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[MADELINE BRERETON WAS STANDING UNDER A ROSE WREATHED ARCH—A TALL, SLENDER GIRL OF NINETEEN.]

## THE HEIRESS OF DEEPDENE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### MADLINE'S LOVER.

ALL her life long Madeline Brereton will remember a certain midsummer morning when she stood amongst the roses in the dear old garden at Deepdene, telling herself that she was surely the happiest girl in the whole world, and little thinking that this was the last day for many a long year that she would thank Heaven for making life so fair!

She was standing under a rose-wreathed arch, dividing the smooth, green velvet of the tennis lawn from the flower-garden beyond; and all around her the roses were blooming—roses red, roses white, roses tinted as delicately as a maiden's blush, roses soft and creamy as her own fair skin, but all dowered with an imperial loveliness.

Look at her, as she lifts one of the glorious blossoms to her lips—a tall, slender girl, with a skin as faultlessly pure as the flower petal,

and large, calm, grey eyes, so dark that they seem black under the deep shadow of their bent lashes! The brows above are perfectly straight and very delicately pencilled, but the face itself gives promise of a future beauty, rather than a present one—as a rule, it is too quiet, too statuesque, to strike the beholder with a sense of its full loveliness. The form also is immature, and lacks as yet the perfectly rounded contours of womanhood; but Madeline is barely nineteen, and it would be pretty safe to prophecy that the next few years will add many charms to her girlish grace.

Behind her rises the stately old mansion of Deepdene, which for the last twelve months has been her home, and which she has grown to love with all the fervour of her passionate heart.

It is a fine old place, with ivy-clad gables, and twisted stacks of chimneys, and lovely old mullioned windows, in which the arms of the Vanes glow in the deep rich tints of stained glass. The only incongruous part of it is a French window, opening on to the lawn from the library; and out of the window there

walks across the grass, a tall, dark man of thirty or thereabouts, who takes off his hat as he approaches Madeline.

He is, if not positively handsome, at least very good-looking. His features are regular, his beard and moustache are full and silky; and if the eyes are set a little too nearly together, and lend him somewhat a sinister expression, it cannot be allowed that such a small fault should mar the general effect of his otherwise handsome face.

As he held out his hand Madeline drew back a little—not consciously, but with an instinctive movement of aversion that she herself was unaware of. Luckily he did not notice it—perhaps, if he had, he might not have held the small, white hand in his quite so long.

"Does my godfather want me?" asked the young girl, quickly.

"No. Sir Richard is busy writing, and intimated that he did not require my society any longer; so, as I had a few minutes to spare before beginning my professional round, I thought I would throw myself on your mercy for awhile."

He smiled as he said this, and showed a set of firm, white teeth that any man might well be proud of. As a matter of fact, Dr. Earnshaw was proud of them, as well as of the rest of his personal attractions.

"Did you come to see my godfather professionally?" queried Madeline, looking at him with a sudden interest.

He did not meet her gaze as he answered.—  
"Well, yes; Sir Richard did not feel quite the thing this morning, so he sent for me."

"Strangel!" murmured the young girl. "He did not tell me he had done so."

"No. Why should he? He feared to alarm you. There is nothing for you to worry about. Sir Richard had rather a long interview with his lawyer yesterday on business matters, and the fatigue or excitement brought on one of his heart attacks. He will be all right after a day's rest."

"I will go to him," Madeline began, taking a step in the direction of the house, but her companion restrained her by placing his hand gently on her arm.

"Pray do nothing of the kind, my dear Miss Brereton. He expressly stated his desire to be alone—indeed, that was one of the reasons why I left him. It is true I had another and more powerful one."

He seemed to expect that she would ask what this reason was, but the girl appeared to have no intention of doing so, and, indeed, did not evince the slightest interest in it.

She had taken a rose from her belt, and was pulling it to pieces, petal by petal, in a sort of angry indecision.

The fact was she wanted to get away from Dr. Earnshaw, but he was standing before her in such a way as to intercept her passage, and she could not pass him without positive rudeness.

"Madeline," he said, bending still nearer, and dropping his voice to a low whisper, "can you not guess why I have sought you? Has not your heart told you that I love you with all my soul, and the dream of my life is to make you my wife?"

The rose dropped from the girl's nerveless fingers, and she raised her large dark eyes with a sudden expression that almost looked like fright.

"Oh, Dr. Earnshaw! You cannot mean this!"

"But I do mean it. Tell me, Madeline, will you marry me?"

"No—no—a thousand times no!" the girl exclaimed vehemently; then in a moment she seemed conscious of the indiscretion of which she had been guilty. "Forgive me!" she murmured, in a different tone, while a warm flood of colour rushed into her cheek. "I have received your offer very rudely, very ungraciously, but you took me by surprise—"

"Then you will not refuse?" he interrupted, eagerly. "Think—think, Madeline, before you speak. I am not a rich man, it is true; but I am on a fair way to become rich, and I can, at least, offer you a comfortable home. Wait—hear me out. So long as Sir Richard lives I am quite aware that you will want for nothing, but suppose anything happens to him—what will you do then?"

Madeline shook her head, but before she could speak her companion went on,—

"You know well that his heir, Captain Vane, bears you no goodwill, that he was angry when he heard that his uncle had brought you to live at Deepdene, and that he has not been near the place since you came. From him you need expect no favour; and I tell you candidly that Sir Richard's life is not worth an hour's purchase! What could you do, thrown helpless on the world—a young, penniless girl?"

"I suppose I could get my own living, as dozens of other girls do," she rejoined, with some spirit.

"Yes," he assented, scornfully; "but what sort of a living would it be? Governessing in a miserable Belgian school, as you were before Sir Richard saw you, and pitted you! And if

the existence was miserable then, think what it would be now that you have experienced twelve months of such a different kind of life! Oh, Madeline, you know not what you speak of when you talk of getting your own living!"

As he finished, the young girl drew herself to her full height—and it was a stately one—and looked him straight in the face.

There was infinite scorn in her lovely lustrous eyes—infinite contempt in the curves of her scarlet lips.

"It seems to me you plead your cause very strangely, Dr. Earnshaw," she said, her voice clear and cold and pitiless. "You ask me to marry you, and instead of relying on affection—which generally comes first in such a question, I believe—you bid me look at the worldly advantages that I should gain by becoming your wife. Whenever I marry—if ever I do—it will be for love, not for a comfortable home or a good income. I am perfectly aware that all you have said is quite true, but at the same time it does not influence me in the smallest degree. I am much obliged to you for your offer, but I must repeat that I can never be your wife."

And saying this she bowed coldly, and motioned him to make way for her with something of the regal grace of a young queen.

He immediately stepped on one side, and, without uttering a word, let her pass by; but after she had gone he remained gazing at the door through which she had disappeared, with a curious expression of malevolence in his eyes.

"So, my haughty maiden, this is the way you treat my love!" he muttered, half aloud. Then he shrugged his shoulders and turned away. "Everything comes to him who waits," he said, with a short laugh; "and if I wait long enough, you, no doubt, will be glad to come to me. I have tried you by fair means, but if those fail I must have recourse to stronger measures."

Meanwhile, Madeline had hurried through the hall, and upstairs, and it was not until she got to the upper landing—which also served as a picture-gallery—that she came to a pause in front of a half-length oil painting of a young man in uniform, whose laughing blue eyes seemed to smile down into hers.

Here she stood, with clasped hands, and a certain styness in her face, gazing up at the handsome, debonnaire features, with the short close-curls of fair hair brushed well back from the temples—fascinated, as she had been from the first moment her eyes fell on the painted canvas.

"Love!" she murmured to herself, thinking of the scene that had just taken place in the garden. "Ah, Dr. Earnshaw, you can never teach me the meaning of love; but if Captain Vane had spoken the words you spoke this morning—"

She did not finish her reverie, for a burning blush rose to her cheeks as she recognised the direction in which her thoughts were treading; and, overcome with maiden shyness, she ran along the gallery to her own room, pursued by the laughing gaze of the blue eyes.

Falling in love with a picture! Could anything be more absurd? And yet this is what had actually befallen little Madeline.

During all the twelve months she had been at Deepdene she had never once passed Captain Vane's picture without staying to glance up at it; and by degrees her fancy told her that the portrait became endowed with some sentient feeling, and understood, if it did not return, her admiration.

Of course this was foolish—as she told herself on those workaday hours when common sense asserted itself, and the practical sunshine did its best to drive away romance; but when the soft twilight shadows fell over the land, and grey dusk filled the silent corridor, Madeline would steal back to her old place in front of the picture; and who shall say what tender romances she wove out of the fine thread of her maiden meditations?

"Dr. Earnshaw said Captain Vane bore

me no good will," she murmured to herself, as she sat in her own room listening to the distant sound of wheels, which told her that her rejected suitor was leaving Deepdene; "and I suppose he was right; but I don't think it is altogether for that reason that he has never been here since I came. I fancy he and Sir Richard have had some quarrel, and it is that which keeps them apart."

Then, naturally enough, she fell to thinking of what Earnshaw had hinted with regard to her own future, and her heart sank at the prospect of resuming her old life of teaching, from which the generosity of Sir Richard Vane had rescued her.

She called to mind how she had met him first on the steps of the English Church in Brussels, when he, struck by her likeness to his mother, asked her what her name was, and drew from her, by dint of his kind words, a history of her short life.

It was a sad one enough. Her mother had died while she was still an infant, and she had wandered about the Continent with her father, stopping at different gambling places where—when he had the money—he played for such stakes as his purse would allow. Sometimes he won—more often he lost, and then he and little Madeline had hard times.

Finally, however, the child fell ill, and the doctor who was called to see her said plainly that if she continued to lead this sort of life she would certainly die.

Her father, in alarm, placed her at a school in Brussels, and so as to put himself beyond the reach of temptation paid two years' fees in advance. Afterwards the fees were not paid quite so regularly, and when Madeline was thirteen years old they ceased altogether, for the very sufficient reason that Mr. Brereton, having had a persistent run of ill-luck at Monte Carlo, ended his miserable and wasted life by putting a bullet through his brain.

Poor Madeline had no relatives to whom she could apply for help, and it is difficult to say what would have become of her if the mistress of the school had not offered to keep her on as a sort of governess-pupil—which offer she gladly accepted.

And so for five long years she taught English and music, receiving just enough salary to enable her to buy one new dress a year, and having no hope of the future to brighten her lonely lot.

But on one blessed, never-to-be-forgotten morning she met Sir Richard Vane, and then a change came.

For the sake of the mother whom he had loved the Baronet resolved to adopt the friendless girl, and forthwith he took her home to England, and installed her at Deepdene as his mistress, treating her with a tenderness such as his own father had never shown towards her, and growing to love her more dearly each day that her character unfolded itself in all its sweetness.

All this Madeline was thinking of as she sat in her pretty, white draped room, her small head resting on one hand, while in her eyes there brooded a great tenderness.

"Oh, how grateful I am to you!" she cried suddenly aloud, apostrophising Sir Richard. "I would give ten years of my life to show you how I love and revere you!"

At this moment there came a quick knock at the door, followed immediately after by the entrance of a frightened, white-faced maid.

"Oh, Miss Madeline, will you come down to Sir Richard, please? There is something wrong with him, and we are afraid he is—"

She stopped herself suddenly, brought to a pause by the white horror that spread itself over the young girl's face. Madeline did not wait to ask any questions, but swiftly as an arrow she ran downstairs, never pausing until she came to the door of the study, round which a group of terrified servants were clustered.

Without hesitating she went in, straight up to the chair where the Baronet always sat when he had any writing to do, and then



she put her hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face.

One glance was enough. In the rigidity of the finely-cut features, in the waxen hue of the skin, but, more than all, in that nameless dread with which the King of Terrors seals his victim, she read the truth.

Sir Richard was dead!

## CHAPTER II.

### MADLINE FINDS THE DIFFERENCE.

The next two days passed in a sort of dream for Madeline, and she spent them in an almost ceaseless vigil by the side of the dead man. All she could do for him, who had done so much for her, was to see that the freshest and sweetest of flowers were placed about his couch, and that no strangers' footsteps should be permitted to pass the sacred precincts where all that was mortal of him lay.

On the evening of the second day she was roughly and rudely disturbed by the housekeeper, who came in to say that Miss Byrne had arrived and wished to see her.

"I cannot come—I cannot see anyone!" the young girl answered, in a hurried whisper, "Why did you not tell her so?"

"It is not my place to give your messages, Miss Brereton," the woman said, in a tone of studied insolence. "And Miss Byrne, who is Captain Godfrey Vane's half-sister, has a right to give what orders she likes in this house. You are not mistress now, please remember."

The words came upon Madeline as a sort of shock. Never until this moment had she realised her changed position—indeed, her mind had been too full of sorrow to leave room for any more selfish considerations. She had supposed, in a vague sort of way, that Captain Vane would come and take possession of Deepdene, but beyond that her ideas had not travelled.

The housekeeper's abrupt speech suddenly awoke her to a sense of her own friendlessness. She was no longer Sir Richard Vane's petted young ward, whose slightest wish was instantly obeyed. Fortune had once more waved her wand, and she was again the desolate girl whom nobody cared for—nobody took any interest in, and in whose downfall the housekeeper openly rejoiced.

But Madeline did not lose either her presence of mind or her dignity—she was far too proud to let her humiliation be more than guessed at.

"Tell Miss Byrne I will come to her directly, and now leave the room, if you please," she said, in a low, but equally clear voice, which awed even Mrs. Soames into submission, although, as she went out, she muttered something in an audible tone about "upstarts."

Luckily Madeline did not hear it, for the moment she was alone she threw herself on her knees beside the bed, and with reverent hands lifted the white linen covering the features that she had loved so well, and upon which she felt she should never look again.

What thoughts passed through her mind in that long, tender gaze it would be hard to put into words. She was not only saying farewell to all she loved on earth, but also to that brighter life which had been so sweet, and—alas!—so short.

It was a very white, statuesque Madeline that finally left the death chamber, and crossed the hall to the morning-room, where Miss Byrne was—a girl whose large dark eyes seemed too big for her wan face, and whose figure looked slimmer and more willowy than ever in its close-fitting black garments.

It was growing dusk, and a lamp had been lighted in the morning-room, and placed on the centre table, whereon also rested a silver tray of cakes, fruit, and wine.

These dainties were being discussed by a dark, sour-faced woman of about eight or nine-

and-thirty, dressed with extreme plainness, whose bonnet lay on a chair by her side, and who, on the entrance of Madeline, put up a pair of eyeglasses, through which she stonily regarded the girl.

"Ah!" she said, at length, "you are the young woman who has been a sort of amanuensis to the late Sir Richard, Miss—a—I really forget your name?"

"Brereton," returned Madeline, quietly, though the blood rushed to her very temples at the very insolence of this greeting.

"Brereton—yes. I am told, Miss Brereton, that since Sir Richard's death"—with what a hideous calm she spoke the words!—"it has been your fancy to stay in the room, and watch beside the corpse—a proceeding of which I highly disapprove—indeed, anything more morbid or unhealthy I never heard of. In future I shall keep the key of the room myself; and, by the way, you may fetch it for me, please."

Madeline stood still for a moment, literally unable to utter a syllable. A change she had been prepared for, but hardly one so absolute and sudden as this.

And yet, by its very completeness, it acted as a sort of tonic upon her, bracing her nerves to a pitch which they could never otherwise have reached.

Instead of answering Miss Byrne, she sharply touched a handbell standing on a side table, and when the summons was replied to with quite suspicious promptitude by a footman, she said, quietly,—

"Miss Byrne wishes to have the key of the library. Kindly fetch it for her."

The man disappeared, and Madeline, turning to her companion, went on with the same unnatural calmness,—

"Is there anything else you wish to say to me?"

"I think not," rejoined the lady, who seemed slightly taken aback by the girl's action. "My brother, Sir Godfrey Vane, will be here either to-morrow or the next day, as he was in Norway when he heard of his uncle's death; and of course when he comes, he will take possession of Deepdene as its master. In the meantime I am his representative, and he has given me full authority to give what orders I think best."

Madeline merely bowed. The information did not seem to her to require comment.

"I suppose," added Miss Byrne, "that you would like to stay for the funeral?"

The young girl started violently. Stay for the funeral! Why, where had she to go to?

But this aspect of the question did not strike Miss Byrne, who had long ago formed a mental opinion of Madeline as an adventurer of the blackest dye, and who was anxious to get rid of her with as little delay as possible—more especially after the scene that had just been enacted.

Miss Byrne prided herself upon being equal to any emergency; but this evening she was not quite so sure as usual that she had been mistress of the situation. Indeed, she had an uneasy sort of conviction that Madeline had beaten her on her own ground.

"Yes," she continued, after a moment's pause, during which her thoughts had been very busy with various speculations. "All things considered, perhaps you had better remain until after the funeral; and, meanwhile, you can communicate with your friends, and make such arrangements for your departure as you think best."

Again Madeline bowed, and then she turned round and left the room, finding her way more by instinct than anything else—for hot tears rose in a blinding mist before her eyes, and her heart was beating with such wild impetuosity that it seemed to her as if it must suffocate her.

Once in her own chamber she locked the door, and began pacing backwards and forwards like some wild animal that has just been trapped.

She was no meek Griselda, this Madeline of ours, but a high-spirited, impressionable girl,

whose intelligence and passion were equally vivid.

One kind word from Miss Byrne would have melted her in a moment; but the insolence of the woman had called forth all the indignation of her nature, and for a few minutes it dominated her.

Then it was swept away by a wave of terrible loneliness and isolation that broke over her soul with crushing violence, and forced her to look her position fully in the face. What was she to do—where was she to go?

She had no friends—no relations—no one, in fact, except the governess in Brussels, who might be willing to take her back on the same terms as before.

What a difference a few short hours had made!

Miss Byrne thoroughly enjoyed her spell of authority at Deepdene. Of late years fate had not permitted her the pleasure of ordering servants about, and playing the rôle of mistress in a big house; and so, perhaps, it was only natural that she should overdo the part in her anxiety to assert her own dignity.

This was the first time she had been to Deepdene, for she was no favourite of the late Baronet, who had been very much incensed when his brother married a widow with a daughter of ten years of age, and who had refused to recognise this daughter even as a connection.

To say the truth, Keziah Byrne was not a pleasant woman. Disappointed in her hopes of matrimony, left out in the cold by reason of her plain face and repellent manners, she had grown sourer year by year, while the "stingy" tendencies of her youth rapidly developed into actual miserliness.

She seemed to have a general spite against women more highly favoured by nature than herself, and the attributes of youth and beauty she was quite unable to forgive in members of her own sex.

Her one redeeming trait was her affection for her half-brother. Ever since he was a small, mischievous, blue-eyed boy, tyrannising over everybody whom he came in contact, she had worshipped him with a passion that was almost fierce, and as a natural consequence she was jealous of every other woman who threatened to rival her in his affection.

Godfrey himself did not arrive at Deepdene until the evening before the funeral, and then he was so tired from constant travelling that he failed to prove a very good listener to Keziah's stories of the servants' extravagance, and how she had caught them in the act of having eggs and bacon for breakfast, a discovery which nearly turned her hair grey on the spot!

"However," she added, complacently, "in future I'll take care that no such thing has a chance of being repeated, for I suppose you'll live here, Godfrey?"

"I suppose so," he returned, thoughtfully, and then he added in a softer tone, "Poor Uncle Richard! His death was a great shock to me. I would give a good deal to see him standing before me once more, kind and genial as he used to be before that unfortunate visit of his to the continent. He has never been the same to me since."

"It's all the fault of that girl he picked up and brought to England with him—impertinent minx!" exclaimed Miss Byrne, with an angry sniff. "No doubt she has feathered her nest pretty well already, or she wouldn't be as independent as she is. For my part, I think it was quite providential that Sir Richard died so suddenly, otherwise he would have been marrying her, or leaving her his money, or something of the sort."

"Hush, Keziah!" the young man said, sternly. "Pay some respect to my uncle's memory, if you please. By the way, where is this Miss Brereton?"

"Upstairs in her room, where she has remained ever since I came here. She must be got rid of as soon as possible, Godfrey."

"As for that, she can take her own time,"

he returned, coldly. "I confess I don't like the girl, but I have no intention of turning her adrift on the world, and I shall take care that she is provided for. However, that must be seen to later on. I don't suppose she is in any hurry to leave Deepdene."

Then he leaned back in his chair, and watched the wreaths of blue smoke as they curled lazily upwards from his cigar.

He was deeply and sincerely sorry for his uncle's sudden death, but at the same time he was quite conscious of a sudden weight being lifted off his mind.

Those debts of his, which Sir Richard had absolutely refused to pay, had been hanging round his neck like a millstone, and now he saw himself free of them, once and for ever.

He saw himself master of Deepdene, possessor of a fine estate, a large income, fulfilling his duties as a country gentleman, honoured, looked up to, respected, and happy in the security of his fortune.

He would turn over a new leaf—the past and its follies should be blotted out in the fresh life that lay before him. In the future neither cards nor horses should attract him from the straight path of duty, and he honestly determined to do his best to deserve the riches that would be his.

He would look after the poor, he would improve the estate—people would regard him as a model landlord. Yes, it was a pleasant vision, and there was no prophetic instinct to warn him that fate had decreed it should not be fulfilled.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SIR RICHARD'S WILL.

THE day of the funeral was damp and dull and dreary. No rain fell, but the air was full of moisture, and the clouds hung low over the shadowed earth.

From her window Madeline watched the cortege as it passed out of the hall, but everything looked to her blurred and indistinct through the scalding tears that blinded her vision; and when she had seen the ominous burden under its velvet pall, carried by eight of Richard's oldest servants, she turned away with a shudder, and hid her face in the pillows of her bed, as if to shut out the sad sight.

How long she remained thus she could hardly have told, but she was finally aroused by a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of one of the under-housemaids—a girl named Sarah, whom Madeline had once nursed through an illness, and who had been devoted to her ever since.

"If you please, miss, Captain Vane says will you come down? The will is going to be read, and he thinks that it is better that you should be there."

Madeline looked, as she felt, much surprised at this request, but after a moment's reflection she decided that she could hardly do otherwise than comply with it; so, with the help of Sarah, she bathed her face and smoothed down the ruffled masses of her disordered hair, and then went white and trembling to the dining room.

On the threshold she paused a moment, overcome with a certain shyness at finding herself in the presence of so many people—for, in addition to Captain Vane and Miss Byrne, there were present Mr. Walters, the solicitor, Dr. Earnshaw, and some five or six of the late Baronet's most intimate neighbours.

Her indecision was put an end to by a gentleman—whom, from his likeness to his picture, she immediately recognised as Godfrey Vane—coming forward, and drawing her arm through his, as he led her to a seat close to his half sister.

"I am sorry," he said, in a low, clear voice that even then thrilled her with a strange sense of delight. "I am sorry that you should have to go through this ordeal at a time when you would naturally shrink from any sort of

publicity; but Mr. Walters thought you ought to be here while my uncle's will is read, and I had no alternative but to summon you. One consolation I can give you—the will is a short one, and will not take many minutes to read."

Madeline bowed without speaking, and Godfrey found himself thinking of her with a feeling of pity for her loneliness, and hoping that his uncle had left her a substantial legacy—for he supposed that her name must be mentioned in the will, otherwise Mr. Walters would not have been so particular in insisting on her presence.

He stole one glance at her after she was seated, and was conscious of a certain disappointment at her appearance.

Madeline did not show to advantage that day. She was pale, and there were dark shadows under her eyes telling of sleepless vigils. Moreover, black did not suit her at the best of times, and the dress she wore was especially heavy and unbecoming.

No, Godfrey decided, she was not pretty, and yet there was something excessively childish and appealing in her demeanour that made him feel as if he wanted to protect her.

There was a dead silence in the room as the lawyer cleared his throat preparatory to beginning to read the will. Miss Byrne bent forward in uncontrollable eagerness, as if determined not to lose a single word.

It was a very short will. A few legacies were left to old servants, a few to charities, an annuity of three hundred a year was bequeathed to Captain Godfrey Vane, and the rest of the testator's property was left to Mr. Walters and Dr. Earnshaw in trust for—Madeline Brereton!

On hearing the mention of her own name the young girl raised her eyes, which, until now, had been fixed on the floor. She saw on the faces of all present a common look of consternation, but on Godfrey's the expression was something more than consternation. It was one of absolute horror, mingled with bewilderment.

"But Mr. Walters!" he exclaimed, starting from his chair, and advancing to the table, somewhat unsteadily. "Surely there must be some mistake! My uncle cannot have meant to disinherit me?"

"I am afraid, Sir Godfrey, that such was his intention," rejoined the lawyer, drily.

A little murmur of indignation went through the room, but Godfrey did not appear to hear it. He had grown deadly pale, and once he put his hand to his brow, and swept the palm across it as if he were trying, by some corresponding mental process, to clear his brain, and thoroughly understand the position.

"To disinherit me for a stranger—me, who am his heir-at-law—his only male relation—who succeeds to his title!" he muttered, more to himself than to his auditors. "It seems incredible—impossible. There is some mystery here. My uncle's mind must in some way have been poisoned against me."

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders. He was a little, wizened, dried-up man, as wrinkled and yellow as his own parchment, and, truth to tell, seemed to enjoy the young officer's discomfiture.

"On that point I am not competent to inform you," he rejoined, in the same cold, business-like tone, and without attempting to meet Godfrey's gaze.

"But I can inform you, if you want information!" suddenly and shrilly cried Miss Byrne, jumping from her seat, and pointing one finger at Madeline.

"There sits the viper who has wound herself round your uncle's heart, and schemed and plotted until she got him to leave her his money—the designing adventuress! As if," she added, glaring venomously at the young girl, "you could not be satisfied with all his kindness to you—with his taking you from some wretched foreign slums"—Miss Byrne did not trouble herself to be accurate in her passion—"and placing you here in comfort and luxury, with-

out trying to steal away his nephew's birth-right from him! Oh, you Jezebel, you—"

Words failed her, and she gasped impatiently in her rage, until her brother seized her unceremoniously by the arm, and conducted her to the door—his own self-possession partially restored by the sight of her passion.

"You must pardon my sister," he said, as he closed the door, and his voice, though strained, had regained its usual calm. "Her feelings escaped her control, as was not, perhaps, altogether unnatural. I have one question to ask you, Mr. Walters. In your opinion, was my uncle of sound mind when he executed that will?"

"Most decidedly he was," very emphatically rejoined the lawyer. "If you are thinking of disputing it, let me tell you, Sir Godfrey Vane, that not all the law courts in England could upset it!"

There was a moment's silence, and in after years Madeline often thought of the scene as it stamped itself then upon her memory. The lofty, oak-ceiled dining-room, with its family portraits, and its handsome, heavy furniture of oak and Russian leather; the stern, surprised faces of the guests, the white rigidity of Godfrey's features, and the unmoved countenance of the lawyer. Dr. Earnshaw sat in the shadow of the window curtains, with his back to the light, so that it was impossible to see his expression.

The girl herself was so utterly taken by surprise—so entirely bewildered by what had happened—than even now she hardly realised it.

After Mr. Walters' last speech she rose to her feet, and tried to speak; but all the excitement she had gone through during the last few days proved too much for her, and the words she would have uttered died on her lips in an indistinct manner.

It was at this juncture that Dr. Earnshaw came forward and offered her his arm.

"Allow me to take you out, Miss Brereton. This scene has been very painful for you," he murmured, sympathetically; and Madeline, though she would fain have refused his offered escort, felt too absolutely weak and feeble to do anything save acquiesce.

Accordingly he led her into another room, and poured out a glass of sherry, which he forced her to drink. The wine did her good, and a little colour came back into her waken cheeks.

"Let me be the first to congratulate you on your good fortune!" said Earnshaw, taking her hand, raising it to his lips before she had time to withdraw it.

"Congratulate me!" she repeated; and there was something approaching horror in her voice. "You surely do not think it possible that I shall be mean enough to take advantage of Sir Richard's bequest?"

It was his turn to look surprised now.

"I don't understand you, Madeline?"

"Then let me explain myself!" she exclaimed, rapidly. "I absolutely refuse to touch a farthing of Sir Richard Vane's fortune. It should, of right, go to his nephew Godfrey, not to me; and I should be the most degraded creature on this earth if I consented to rob him of it. When Sir Richard made that will he was under some sort of misapprehension with regard to his nephew, which, if he had lived longer, would doubtless, have been cleared up. As it is, I must do my best to set things straight, and that I shall do by at once giving up my claim in Sir Godfrey's favour."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her words. Evidently she meant every one of them, and Earnshaw knew her character quite well enough to recognise this.

His dark face grew a little paler, and he pulled nervously at his full beard—a trick of his when he was at all excited.

"That is all very well, my dear child," he said, at length, "and the sentiments do you credit; but there are one or two points you have to consider. Firstly, there is no reason



to suppose that Sir Richard had not very good cause for mistrusting his nephew, who is a careless spendthrift, living a life of dissipated extravagance, and totally unfitted to have the responsibility of such wealth and estates as these—

Madeline waved her hand impatiently; but Earnshaw went on without permitting her to speak.

"Leaving this, however, on one side, there is another fact to look at, and it is that you are quite powerless at the present time to do anything at all. Remember, you are a minor, and until you reach the age of twenty-one are absolutely under the control of your trustees—Mr. Walters and myself."

He smiled slightly as he spoke the last words, and somehow that smile of his made Madeline feel like a bird who has been just trapped. Before she had come to any conclusion the door opened, and the solicitor himself entered.

"Ah!" he said, carefully closing the door, "I thought I should find you here. I have just been speaking to Sir Godfrey alone, and I fear I have left him in very desponding spirits, for he is convinced of the hopelessness of disputing the will, and his three hundred a-year hardly appears to content him."

"That is not very surprising," observed Madeline, coldly. "If I had been heir to some thousands a-year, I don't think I should be content with three hundred either!"

The lawyer looked at her in surprise, and raised his eyebrows.

"It's an ill wind that blows no one any good," he returned, shrugging his shoulders. "And Captain Vane's loss is your gain, Miss Brereton!"

"I don't intend that it shall be," she rejoined, quickly. "I have been telling Dr. Earnshaw that it is my wish to give up everything Sir Richard has left to me to his nephew—and it is a wish that shall be carried out too!" she added, emphatically.

The two men exchanged a quick glance of comprehension, which the young girl, intent on her own thoughts, did not observe. After a moment's silence, she said, abruptly,—

"Is it true, Mr. Walters, that I cannot legally execute a deed of gift of the Deepdene Estates to Sir Godfrey Vane?"

"Not while you are under age, Miss Brereton. Of course, when you are twenty-one you can do what you like."

"But, at least, I can sign an undertaking that when I am twenty-one I will execute this deed?"

The solicitor shook his head.

"It would have no legal significance whatever, and you would be at liberty to repudiate it at any moment. No, Miss Brereton, if you will take my advice, you will do nothing of the sort. Wait till you are of age; and, believe me," he added, cynically, "the years will bring you wisdom."

To hope that either of these men would help her, Madeline saw would be utterly futile. They were both antagonistic to Godfrey Vane—for what reason she could not tell—and would be far more likely to throw obstacles in her way than to remove them. If she intended carrying her plan to a successful issue, she must depend wholly and solely upon herself.

She walked away from them to the window, and remained there, gazing intently on the misty landscape, but seeing nothing in the preoccupation of her thoughts.

At last she determined that she would see the young officer, and tell him straightforwardly her intentions. Perhaps he would laugh at them, as Dr. Earnshaw and the solicitor had done; but, on the other hand, perhaps he would believe them.

Yes, that was her next step; and as she came to this conclusion she raised her head, and was about turning from the window, when the noise of wheels made her look out on the gravelled approach that swept around the front of the house.

A dogcart, driven by one of the grooms, was on the point of entering the avenue of limes

leading to the Lodge, and in it were seated a lady and gentleman—Miss Byrne and Godfrey Vane.

A little cry of dismay broke from Madeline's lips, and the sound of it brought the two gentlemen to the window.

"The gallant Captain has not been long in shaking the dust of Deepdene off his feet," was Dr. Earnshaw's observation. "I expect it will be many a long day ere he sees it again."

The prophecy was a true one.

(To be continued)

## THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

### CHAPTER XXV.

Conspiracies no sooner should be formed  
Than executed.

—Addison.

It was rather singular that fortune should have so far favoured the schemes of the Countess as to make her falsehood seem truth, yet the explanation is very simple.

Lady Rosenbury and Geraldine had driven out alone, and the latter had intended to seize that opportunity to confide to her friend her new hopes and happiness, but she had changed her intention. In the noisy streets, in an open carriage, with footmen behind, and coachman in front, she could not, of course, communicate her happy secret, and she had resolved to defer its communication until a more convenient season.

Her friend could not avoid seeing that she was happy and joyful, although she had not a suspicion as to the cause.

On their way home they had encountered Lord Rosenbury, who had begged to be taken up, on a plea of the hot weather; and he had, therefore, taken possession of the vacant seat, exerting himself to be agreeable.

They all bowed to Walter, who returned their salutations with grave dignity, and then hurried onward.

The sight of their beaming faces seemed to jar upon his mind at that moment, and for an instant he felt keenly the difference of fortune and social position that existed between himself and Rosenbury.

It was but for a single moment. The next he had recovered his usual serenity and contentment, rejoicing in the many blessings he actually possessed, and proceeded quietly to his chambers to write to Geraldine.

"I am inclined to think, Egbert," remarked Lady Montford, as she re-entered the library, where her husband was seated, after the departure of the young artist, "that Mr. Lorraine loves your niece for her wealth, not for herself!"

"Why do you think so, Justina?"

"Because, although I made a few subtle remarks, which meant something and implied a great deal more, he changed colour but once, and concluded by informing me in the coolest manner that he had every faith in Geraldine, and should not doubt her until he had heard from her own lips that she was tired of him. What do you think of that, Egbert? Why, if he really loved her he would have been fierce and angry, demanded to see her, vowed vengeance when I said she was driving with Lord Rosenbury, instead of acting in his calm, passionless way!"

"An Italian might do as you describe, Justina," responded the Earl, "but I imagine that Walter Lorraine has but little jealousy in his composition. Besides, to give you the probable explanation of his calmness, although it's not very flattering to you, I think he didn't believe a word you said!"

The Italian frowned darkly.

The Earl smiled as he perceived her emotion, and continued,—

"He, of course, thinks Geraldine perfect, and has unbounded faith in her. Still, do not

despair, Justina. Although he showed no jealousy, one of your arrows might have struck home. You see, I differ with you in thinking that he loves her, and not her money. Geraldine is a woman to win and keep love—yes, and to love devotedly in return!"

"You seem to think a great deal of her," remarked the Countess, discontentedly.

"I admire her!" replied the Earl, and am proud of her. She is the most beautiful woman I ever beheld."

"The most beautiful?"

The Earl assented.

Justina gave her husband a jealous, angry look, at which he laughed, and continued,—

"I can be proud of my niece, I hope, Justina, without arousing your jealousy! Having arrived at your present age, you should give up those old follies of yours. If you take the trouble to remember, you know that I left you years ago on account of your jealous absurdities!"

"Mature age! Absurdities!" muttered the Countess, with a display of wrath that was altogether too great for the occasion. "You had better take care, Egbert. As for your young and sensible niece, she won't stay much longer under the same roof that shelters me, I can tell her that! I hate her!"

She placed a strong emphasis on the adjectives "young" and "sensible," and spoke with a bitterness that greatly amused the Earl.

It was plain enough that, if he had ever felt any love for her, it had long since vanished. He seemed to delight in stirring up her evil passions, over which she possessed little enough control, just as thoughtless boys like to annoy wild beasts in their cages.

"Well, well, we won't quarrel, Justina," he said, after a brief silence. "If you are going into English society you must expect to find many ladies more beautiful than yourself—and much younger! Wouldn't it be more sensible to admire them than to envy them, and be jealous of the admiration they excite?"

The Countess replied only by tapping her foot impatiently upon the floor, but it was evident that her husband's words only served to add oil to the flame of her passions.

Her self-love had been deeply wounded by the Earl's observations, and, in consequence, she began already to feel a strong aversion to Lady Geraldine, who had been declared her superior in beauty by the person of all others whom the Countess desired to dazzle.

The newly remarried couple spent some time in sarcastic remarks, the Earl greatly enjoying the effect of every wound he gave, and the Countess indulging in passionate tears and exclamations. At length, either tiring of his unmanly employment, or fearing to go too far, his lordship made advances towards a reconciliation, and soon after they were seated amicably side by side, discussing and maturing their plans in regard to Geraldine.

As it approached the dinner-hour the Countess consulted her watch, and said,—

"It is time for me to make my preparations, Egbert. I shall have to proceed very carefully to avoid the observation of the butler or his assistance. I wonder if your niece has returned?"

"Oh, yes!" responded the Earl, whose hearing was extremely keen. "I heard her step in the hall a short time since."

The Countess smiled with satisfaction, and glided from the apartment, hastening to the conservatory.

Here she busied herself some time, recklessly cutting the lovely blossoms from their parent stems, and arranging them with great taste in a delicate Sevres vase she had brought from the drawing-room for the purpose.

When she had finished her self-imposed task she proceeded to the dining-room, which, fortunately for her designs, was at the minute vacant. Placing her vase of flowers in the centre of the table, the Countess paused and looked around.

The table glittered with delicate porcelain, crystal and silver, and tempting viands were

already upon it. By each plate, after the French fashion, stood a bottle of wine, the cork already drawn, and this feature immediately attracted the Countess's attention.

She went to Geraldine's seat, drew a tiny vial from her pocket, withdrew the cork from the wine-bottle, and while her eyes and ears kept watch for the approach of anyone, her white hands hovered over the table.

The next moment she replaced the vial in her pocket and the cork in the bottle, and with an expression of satisfaction on her features glided from the room.

As she passed out of the door her dress brushed against the butler, who was about to enter, all unconscious of the act which had been effected in his brief absence from the apartment.

Not long after dinner was announced, and the Countess re-entered the dining-room, leaning on the Earl's arm, and followed by Lady Geraldine and Mrs. Tomlins.

They made a very pleasant family party as they sat down at the table.

The Countess was in very good-humour, as was the Earl, and Geraldine exerted herself to please her uncle's bride, while Mrs. Tomlins, as usual, acted the part of faithful echo to her young patroness and friend.

After dinner the ladies returned to the drawing-room, leaving the Earl to enjoy his wine and cigars in solitude, and the Countess engaged Mrs. Tomlins in conversation.

Lady Geraldine endeavoured to bear her share in it, but she began to feel strangely tired and drowsy, and soon retreated to one of the deep window-seats, letting the curtains fall in front of her, entirely concealing her.

Justina observed this movement, and allowed the conversation to flag. Soon after the Earl came up, and Mrs. Tomlins then remarked,—

"I beg your ladyship's pardon, but I did not observe Lady Geraldine's withdrawal. I will join her, if you please."

The Countess bowed, and Mrs. Tomlins left the room.

The Italian then arose, proceeding to the window-seat, where she found the maiden quietly sleeping.

Patting up her finger she beckoned the Earl to her side.

"How still she is!" whispered his lordship, gazing at the quiet face of the sleeper. "You are sure, Justina, that you gave her the right drug? Oh, what if she should never awaken!"

"Nonsense, Egbert. How could I mistake? The bottles are all labelled. Her sleep will last but a couple of hours. I will give you her ring, and you had better hasten to a jeweller's. The shops close so early nowadays that you had better hasten."

She quietly withdrew the betrothal-ring from Geraldine's finger, and handed it to his lordship. He took it, and immediately departed on his errand.

Justina then dropped the curtains upon the sleeping form, and took up a book, in which she endeavoured to interest herself.

Her occupation was soon interrupted by the return of Mrs. Tomlins, who looked uneasy and anxious.

"Has your lordship seen anything more of Lady Geraldine?" she asked. "She is not in her boudoir, nor, indeed, in any of her rooms."

"Possibly she is in the conservatory or the library," answered the Countess, carelessly.

"Ah, yes. I wonder I didn't think of that," declared Mrs. Tomlins. "The reason of my anxiety, your ladyship, is that Lady Geraldine has not been herself lately—not since our last visit to Rock Land. She has seemed so strangely happy, and to-day she has started at every knock, as though she expected some particular person to call upon her."

"Perhaps she is in love?" suggested the Italian.

"Perhaps, your ladyship," was the response. "Lady Geraldine never permits any conversation on that subject between us—never

talks of her lovers nor the offers of marriage she has received—so that I expect to know nothing of her love affairs until I, with the rest of the world, hear an announcement of her engagement."

"She must be a very singular young lady," remarked the Countess, "not to boast of her conquests."

"Lady Geraldine is no coquette, your ladyship," responded Mrs. Tomlins. "I think it gives her real pain to refuse any one, and she has great delicacy of feeling. I never heard her say that she had ever refused an offer. I believe she considers the subject of love too sacred for ordinary discussion."

As the Countess expressed some interest in the dissection of the maiden's characteristics, Mrs. Tomlins proceeded to praise Geraldine with a heartiness of manner that showed how sincerely she loved and respected her.

The conversation was finally interrupted by the return of the Earl, and Mrs. Tomlins seized the opportunity of retiring to her own chamber.

"Well, Egbert?" said Justina, inquiringly, when they found themselves alone.

"Has Geraldine awakened yet?"

The Countess glanced behind the curtains and answered in the negative.

"You are sure the drug won't hurt her?"

"Yes, yes!" declared the Italian, impatiently. "Did you find a shop open? Did you match the ring?"

"Very easily indeed. Put it on her finger, and I'll tell you my success!"

The ring was replaced upon the sleeper's finger, and the Earl continued,—

"It is simply a very heavy but ordinary ring, Justina, and I had not the slightest difficulty in matching it. I had the inscription inside the ring accurately copied, and am to have a similar ring at an early hour to-morrow morning!"

"Very good!" commented Justina, with a delighted smile. "We will send the ring back to-morrow, with a note, if necessary!"

The Earl assented, and looked upon the face of his still-sleeping niece with a triumphant expression.

As if that baleful glance had power to arouse her even in her enforced slumbers, the maiden stirred uneasily.

"Come away, Egbert!" whispered the Countess. "She is going to awaken. The power of the drug is over."

The Earl obeyed her, and they seated themselves upon a distant sofa, and began to converse about the household, and the changes in its management which the Countess proposed to make.

The curtains soon again stirred, and they heard a low exclamation of surprise from the window.

Lady Geraldine then came forth from her concealment, and after making some apologies for her singular sleepiness, withdrew to her own apartments.

"So far, our plans have prospered," said Justina, after the maiden's departure. "Mr. Lorraine will send Geraldine a note, of course, which will arrive in the morning. We will intercept the note, and send it back with the ring! He has pride—I could read it in his face—and he will probably leave town in disgust at her supposed coquetry. And then we must work up her woman's pride to cause her to accept Rosebury. This is a delightful intrigue to me, Egbert, but very easy—very easy indeed to accomplish!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Who never doubted never half believed,  
Where doubt there truth is—'tis her shadow.  
—Bailey.

UPON returning to his chambers Walter's first movement was to write a long letter to his betrothed, again announcing his return and detailing the facts of his recent visit to her. Although believing that she had received

his previous letter, he did not doubt in the least her constancy or love. He did not reproach her for taking the hour appointed for their interview for a drive with his rival Lord Rosebury, and his letter breathed only the purest faith and devotion. It is true that Walter failed to perceive any just reason for Geraldine's conduct, but he believed that it was susceptible of a very simple explanation. With his high ideas, however, he resolved never to ask any explanation, lest it might seem that one was necessary to clear up his doubts of her truth.

The instructions of the Countess were remembered, but had entirely failed in their object—the lover smiling as he recalled them at the very idea that Lady Geraldine could prove fickle and changeable.

The letter, a tender and impassioned production, was at length finished, and Walter posted it himself, then returning home to spend the evening in reading and thought.

Could he have foreseen the fate to which his letter was doomed he would hardly have felt so happy and peaceful.

It was delivered the next morning at Montford House, was carried up to the Countess, who opened and read it, smiled and sighed alternately at the tenderness lavished upon Geraldine, and then consigned it to her pocket.

Walter remained in his studio the whole of the following day in expectation of a summons from his betrothed, but the hours wore away, and still none came. He tortured himself with mental inquiries as to her strange silence, and more than once his mind involuntarily resorted to the words of the Countess, but only to indignantly reject their meaning.

His brush seemed to have suddenly lost its charms for him, his books seemed to contain a medley of words without sense, and every occupation palled upon him.

He had several calls from fashionable friends, who liked to keep up his acquaintance because he was a rising artist, and because he had been such a favourite with the late Lord Rosebury, as well as with her ladyship; but they finally departed, leaving him alone with his sad thoughts.

Late in the afternoon, just as he was meditating a call at the Earl of Montford's residence, the familiar knock of the postman was heard, and Parkin brought up to his master a tiny packet and a letter.

Both were addressed, apparently, in Geraldine handwriting.

Walter instantly recognised the delicate characters, for he had frequently seen notes written to Lady Rosebury, and had himself been the recipient of one or two business letters from her in regard to the portrait he had painted for her.

With a violently-throbbing heart he locked his door, and sat down to peruse the letter.

His fingers trembled so that he could hardly tear open the dainty envelope, so he laid it upon his knee, and began an examination of the little packet.

It appeared to contain a small square box, and Walter decided to open it before reading the accompanying letter.

He opened it and beheld his ring—the betrothal ring he had placed upon the finger of Geraldine!

At least, the young artist believed it to be the same—the cheat being perfect—and with a hollow groan he let it fall from his hands to the floor.

"It was true, then," he thought, despairingly. "Geraldine had tired of him—had awakened to a realisation of the great difference between their social positions—had decided to rebuke with proper spirit his presumption!"

The anguish which Walter now endured was far greater than he had suffered after the late inopportune visit of Clete Lorraine to his studio, when Geraldine and Lady Rosebury were both visiting him.

Then he had expected nothing but disappointment. Now he had been led to hope,



had made glorious plans for the future, had tasted the cup of bliss, and his reverses were all the more bitter.

As soon as he could command his thoughts sufficiently he picked up the ring and surveyed it attentively.

How mocking looked the inscription within that tiny circle!

He could not bear to look upon it, so he flung it down again, and turned his attention to the letter.

It was sealed with Geraldine's initials and her crest, but giving only a glance at the seals he broke open the letter and read it.

It was brief, but full of startling meaning.

It began by stating that the accompanying packet would declare the writer's wishes more fully than any letter could do, but that she desired to put an end to the pleasant little flirtation that had beguiled the monotony of Rock Land, and begged that Mr. Lorraine would not call upon her for the present, as explanations were always disagreeable. It stated that since the writer's return to brilliant society she had realised how impossible it would be for her to sacrifice herself to a struggling artist, and how necessary to her happiness were the adulations of the gay world. It concluded by begging him not to despise her for what he might deem her weakness, and with a hope that years hence, when both were suitably married, they might meet and smile over the little episode at Rock Land.

To this precious document was appended the name of Geraldine Summers.

Walter read it again and again, his gaze lingering over the delicate characters that expressed such terrible meaning, and at length he discerned a postscript to the effect that the writer had accepted Lord Rosenbury, and earnestly begged Walter not to interfere with her plans.

A bitter smile curved the artist's lips, and it was succeeded by more bitter tears.

As soon as he felt capable of reasoning he thought over the matter, but he could derive no hope from his reflections.

Perhaps Geraldine had been subjected to strong argument from her uncle, and was but obeying him. Perhaps—but many reasons presented themselves why a lord—an honoured and wealthy peer—should be preferred to a "struggling artist."

"I will go and see her!" he finally ejaculated, springing to his feet. "I will hear from her own lips my dismissal! Until she tells me with her own voice the 'little episode' at Rock Land was on her side only a flirtation I will not believe it!"

He caught up his hat, and was about starting from the room, when he realised that his dressing-gown was scarcely a suitable garment for the streets, and with feverish haste he proceeded to make his toilet.

The evening had long since come on, the shadows being unheeded by the artist in his deep grief, but the glare from the street lamps gave a dim light to the studio, and Walter mechanically lighted the gas.

His toilet was at length completed, and after telling his anxious valet that he should return early Walter hastened into the street.

He had put the ring and letter into his pocket, determined to return them and Geraldine's promise together.

The latter had been artfully planned to make him despise his betrothed, but such a sentiment could not find room in the breast that cherished such a passionate devotion for her.

All the while he had felt, as he had said, that his happiness was too great, that it was very singular that Geraldine should stoop from her high station to love him, the son of a humble and illiterate gardener, and that feeling now prevented his having any doubt as to the authenticity of the letter.

Besides, who could have known of the compact with regard to the ring?

He soon arrived at Montford House, and asked to see Lady Geraldine. The foot-

man, who had received his orders, ushered him into the drawing-room, into the presence of the Countess.

After sending the letter and ring, the Italian had learned that Walter might demand a verbal explanation, and decided to spend the evening at home in order to meet him.

The artist greeted her politely, and asked for Lady Geraldine.

"She is gone out," was the reply, given with feigned hesitation, and with a look of pretended pity.

Walter asked where.

"To the theatre—to Drury Lane, with Lord Rosenbury?" responded the Countess.

"Geraldine had a particular desire to see Milton's *Comus* acted, and his lordship was delighted, of course, to escort her. Lady Rosenbury accompanied them."

Walter bowed, and unheeding the urgent invitation to remain departed abruptly.

With his brain in a tumult, and his heart throbbing more violently than ever, Walter hastened to the theatre, and endeavoured to gain admittance.

He found that the stalls were all taken, and that the only choice left him was a box or a seat in the pit.

He chose the latter, as affording him a better opportunity of observing his betrothed, and made his way to the pit, finding a seat upon the extremity of one of the narrow and uncomfortable-looking benches, quite near the door.

From this position he obtained a complete view of the box taken by Lord Rosenbury and its occupants.

Lady Rosenbury and Geraldine occupied the foreground, and never had either looked more beautiful to the young artist.

The former was dressed in a mauve moire, with her round, fair shoulders covered by a berthe of filmy lace, and her sweet and beautiful face beamed with its usual sunshine.

Lady Geraldine was also dressed very richly and becomingly, in a style that befitted her youth and beauty, and there was a smile upon her lips and a light in her eyes that seemed to mock the anguish of her lover.

Lord Rosenbury, who sat a little behind, yet between his two lovely charges, had been saying something that had made them both smile, and for the first time in his life Walter felt a pang of jealousy.

But he soon noticed that the smile quickly fled from Geraldine's face, and that a shadow succeeded it—a shadow so faint as to be perceptible only to himself. He noticed, too, that a sadness succeeded the light in her eyes, and that her attitude expressed a patience, as though she were waiting for something.

He read it rightly.

All day Geraldine had looked for him with girlish eagerness, endeavouring to repress her anxiety, yet continually wondering why he did not come to see her, or write her at least one line.

She had received a note from Lady Rosenbury in the morning, inviting her to go with her to Drury Lane; and anxious to escape her own thoughts and fears, she had accepted the invitation.

Lady Rosenbury had called at an early hour for her, accompanied by Lord Rosenbury, and while the latter visited the Earl, the maiden had communicated her betrothal to her best and truest friend.

Nothing could exceed her ladyship's joy on discovering that her favourite, Walter Lorraine, had been blessed with the fruition of his hopes, and was really engaged to be married to the lovely belle. She bestowed her blessing upon the maiden with a motherly tenderness, and with tears of gratified feeling.

Walter feasted his eyes upon the countenance of Lady Geraldine, watching every change in her expression, soon becoming satisfied that she realised as little of the play as he himself, and that she was not entirely happy and contented.

His heart swelled almost to bursting at this

thought, and for relief he turned his gaze upon the face of Lady Rosenbury.

How sweet and happy she looked!

The secret tie that bound her to Walter made itself felt to the young artist at that moment in an excess of tenderness and love.

His glances soon reverted to Geraldine, whose gaze was now wandering restlessly about the theatre, even resting upon the occupants of the pit.

It was, perhaps, the magnetism of the artist's glances that drew her attention in the direction of himself; but, whatever the cause, their gaze soon met.

A quick, glad smile suddenly beamed upon Geraldine's features, and she inclined her head.

Walter mechanically returned the bow.

The maiden then turned to Lady Rosenbury, and seemed to communicate the fact of Walter's presence, for her ladyship glanced over the heads in the pit, singled out the golden locks of the young artist, and beckoned him to come to her box.

Walter took advantage of the first change of scene to accept the invitation, and made his way out of the pit to Lady Rosenbury's box.

Rosenbury, with apparent good grace, made room for him beside him, and the ladies each extended a hand to him.

Walter shook hands with each, seeing neither of them, and then sank into a chair by Lady Rosenbury's side.

"How very pale you look, my dear Walter!" said her ladyship, with tender interest.

"Have you been ill since your return?"

Walter replied in the negative.

"How changed your voice is!" continued her ladyship. "I am quite alarmed, dear Walter."

"It is nothing, dear Lady Rosenbury," said the young artist, conscious that Geraldine was looking at him. "Please don't speak of my appearance. I shall be well in a day or two."

Lady Rosenbury was silenced on that point, but not convinced.

Although secretly alarmed at Walter's apparent illness she changed the subject, remarking—

"You have been home two days from Rock Land, Walter, and haven't yet been to see me! Has the new love entirely destroyed the old?"

"Never!" declared the artist, with emphasis. "Dear Lady Rosenbury, my best, truest, only friend, I will come and see you to-morrow!"

Lady Geraldine had listened to the whole of this conversation, wondering why Walter did not speak to her, and if he were really very ill. She longed to clasp his hand, and inquire into the cause of his grief—if his illness were caused by grief—and console him, but she was obliged to listen to the rapid remarks of Rosenbury, or observe the equally uninteresting play.

At length, with sudden resolution, she begged his lordship to exchange seats with her, as the glare of the lights was distasteful to her. Rosenbury could not refuse to grant the request, and reluctantly yielded his seat to her, Geraldine taking her place in the background and beside her lover.

As Walter watched the movement his heart increased its beatings, and a film seemed to gather over his vision, shutting out her form, the lights, everything.

"Are you ill, Walter?" she asked, her sweet, tender voice arousing him. "You make me very anxious!"

"Anxious?" repeated Walter.

"Yes," replied Geraldine, not knowing what to make of his looks and manner. "Why haven't you been to see me yesterday or to-day?"

As she spoke she slid her hand into his for a single instant—a motion unobserved even by the jealous, watchful Rosenbury.

As she did so the gleam of her betrothal ring caught Walter's gaze.

He stared at it in silent amazement.

Geraldine repeated her question.

"My darling!" he whispered, in a tone that

was inaudible to every one save herself. "Oh! I have been basely deceived! Forgive me for believing even so skilful a falsehood! Look at this!"

He drew from his pocket the ring he had recently received and laid it in her hand.

Her surprise on seeing it instantly convinced him that he had been duped by an enemy.

"Read this!" he said, handing her the letter.

She obeyed, reading it through.

"Where did you get these?" she asked, when she had finished.

"They came to me by post this afternoon, in response to a letter I sent you this morning," replied Walter.

"Of course you did not for an instant believe I wrote this silly and infamous letter?"

"Forgive me, darling," whispered Walter. "I doubted when I read the letter that you sent it, but the ring—I feared you had been induced to return it?"

The maiden's reproachful look melted before his beaming countenance, and she said,—

"Ah, Walter, you believe it because you have too lowly and unjust an opinion of yourself. Having loved you once, how could I ever cease to love you? How could I ever love another? I own the deception was managed very skilfully, and I do not blame you for believing it. The attempt to separate us may not end here. Let us promise, then, never to believe aught against each other, and never trust in appearances!"

Walter readily promised.

Lady Rosenbury, glancing around at the boxes, was astonished at beholding the change that had taken place in the artist's appearance—he now looked so well and so happy.

The lovers endeavoured to pay attention to the play, and even Rosenbury could see nothing loverlike in their manner; nevertheless, neither heard a word that was uttered upon the stage.

At the conclusion of *Comus* the party prepared to take their departure, and as Walter cloaked his betrothed she appointed an hour upon the following day when he should call upon her.

"I want to know all about this ring and note, Walter," she whispered. "I must discover who is so active in separating us. I have suspicions, of course. We will discuss the matter to-morrow!"

At this juncture Lady Rosenbury approached them, and said,—

"Accept my congratulations my dear Walter. Don't forget to call upon me to-morrow!"

Walter pressed her ladyship's hand, and Rosenbury, consumed with envy and jealousy, would have given half his ill-acquired fortune for the privilege of insulting him on the spot. But he was obliged to mask his real feelings, and feign a friendship he could not feel. He was not only jealous of the artist's favour in Geraldine's sight, but enraged to behold him on such friendly terms with Lady Rosenbury.

Every hand-pressure they exchanged, every glance of motherly tenderness from her ladyship to Walter, every look of adoring affection—such as might be given a guardian angel—from Walter to her ladyship seemed to menace his false position as Lord Rosenbury.

He inwardly resolved that his present state of suspense should soon be terminated, and led the way to the waiting carriage.

Walter followed with the ladies, conducted them to the vehicle, and with a warm hand-clasp from each—his unknown mother and betrothed bride—saw them depart, in charge of Rosenbury, and then turned his steps towards his chambers, his heart swelling with his newfound happiness and joy.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

When lovers meet in adverse hour

'Tis like a sun glimpse through a shower,

A watery ray an instant seen

Then darkly closing clouds between.—*Roskdy*

THE next day after the meeting at the

theatre, Walter Loraine proceeded, at the hour appointed by Lady Geraldine, to the residence of the Earl of Montford. To the bliss of finding that his betrothed had remained true to him, and that her love for him had in it no element of change, had succeeded stern and grave reflections in regard to the deception that had been practised upon him in connection with the ring. He realised that he had a powerful enemy at work to prevent his marriage with his betrothed, and it did not take much reasoning to convince himself that this unscrupulous and unprincipled, he found it difficult to believe, and yet his enemy could be no other. He had never particularly liked nor admired Lord Montford, deeming him haughty and purse proud, but he had always deemed him a man of honour and a gentleman in his nature, until the present revelation.

Having decided that the Earl was his enemy, Walter speedily suspected that his lordship had in the Countess an able and active assistant in his designs. It was her ladyship who had told him that Geraldine had received his letter, and he began to suspect that this statement was false, and that both his letters had been intercepted. He resolved to speedily know the truth in regard to them.

If, as he feared, the Countess abetted the designs of the Earl, her guardianship and home were unfit for the maiden, as well as unsafe; and Walter began to think seriously of urging Geraldine to a speedy marriage—with or without her guardian's consent.

It seemed to him that his betrothed was like a lamb in a den of lions, and he longed to take her away to a quiet home of their own, where, as her husband, he could shield her from every ill.

Busy with these thoughts, he looked very grave as he ascended the marble steps of the Montford mansion and raised the massive knocker.

The door was immediately opened by the liveried footman.

"I wish to see Lady Geraldine Summers," said Walter, extending his card to be carried to her.

"She is engaged!" replied the footman, in an insolent tone.

"What do you mean, fellow?" said the artist, haughtily. "I call by appointment!"

"Can't help that, Mr. Loraine. Our orders are not to admit you, now or at any time!"

Walter put out his hand as if to thrust the lacquey aside and advance to the drawing-room, but the fellow continued,—

"You had better go, sir, quietly. You won't like to be put out by force, but I have orders to put you out if you attempt to enter. There's people in the drawing-room as you may not like to see you—"

Walter turned abruptly on his heel and departed.

As the door closed behind him with a crash Geraldine glanced from the bow-window of her boudoir, securely sheltered behind the Persian blinds, and saw his form rapidly passing down the street.

"He must have been here just now," she thought. "Can it be that he has been refused admittance?"

Fired by the thought, she sprang up and hastened to the library.

As she expected, her uncle was there with his wife.

"Uncle," she said, "has Mr. Loraine been here just now?"

"Well, yes, Geraldine, I believe so," replied the Earl, languidly, sipping a glass of iced sherbet, the heat being great.

"But why has he gone?" demanded the maiden. "I made an appointment with him at three."

"He is not a proper associate for you, my dear child," responded the Earl, "and I have forbidden him the house!"

"Forbidden him the house!" ejaculated Geraldine. "What do you mean, uncle? Do you mean to restrict my list of visitors? What

right have you to forbid Mr. Loraine my presence?"

"The right of your guardian, my dear," said his lordship, quietly. "I cannot allow you to receive such an improper person in my house. This Loraine is simply a fortune-hunter, and I am but doing my duty in forbidding him access to your presence?"

"He is no fortune-hunter, uncle," declared the maiden, with spirit and resolution. "He is my betrothed husband, and has a right to see me!"

"Don't get in a passion, my dear Geraldine," said the Earl, in a most tantalising tone. "The weather is so very warm, although it's only early May. Won't you have a glass of sherbet, as your aunt and I are doing?"

Geraldine made no reply to the invitation, but said,—

"It is true that your lordship is my guardian, but that fact gives you no right to interfere with my choice of a husband. My father, in his will, constituted you simply the guardian of my person until my marriage or majority, but he gave you no control over my liberty, and no right to force me into a marriage that is repulsive to me. To prevent all misunderstandings between us, allow me to say that I shall keep my betrothal vows to Mr. Loraine!"

"It seems to me that, for an English lady of high birth, Lady Geraldine Summers is rather bold in the expression of her opinions," said the Countess, with a barely perceptible sneer. "I always thought that English maidens were so delicate and modest. I hardly expected to find one so eager to pursue her own headstrong way that she would insult her guardian—her own uncle too!"

Geraldine blushed with vexation, and the Earl remarked,—

"I hardly expected to see my niece—the gay and courted belle—so deeply in love with a low painter that her pride could overlook his coldness. Allow me to prove to you, Geraldine, that your Adonis is only a fortune-hunter. He proposed to you at Rook Land, but I met you on the shore, discovered the fact of your engagement, and threatened him, &c. The effect of my words was that he feared I could keep from him your fortune. Since then, you haven't heard a word from him. He neglects you. He came to-day to see you—you say by appointment. The appointment, I suppose, was made at Rook Land?"

"On the contrary," said Geraldine, "it was made last evening. I had the pleasure of an interview with Mr. Loraine at the theatre, and an opportunity of explaining that the ring he received yesterday was not the one he gave me, and that the letter he received at the same time, signed with my name, was a base forgery."

The Earl trembled with anger and dismay on hearing this remark, and his glass of sherbet, which he had just replenished, was partly spilled upon the carpet.

The Countess coloured with chagrin at the failure of her plans. She had given Walter a knowledge of Geraldine's whereabouts the previous evening, expecting that he would go to the theatre, see her in Rosenbury's company, believe the letter, and forsake his betrothed and his country without delay.

Geraldine was not long in remarking the emotion of her relatives at her communication, and continued,—

"Of course, I can judge to whom I am indebted for this interest in my welfare; but I am willing to overlook it on consideration of a different course towards me in future."

"You will never receive that Loraine in my house!" declared the Earl, emphatically. "As to your insinuations in regard to the ring and letter, I do not understand them. As your guardian, I shall be upheld by society in refusing him my house!"

"Then I shall see him elsewhere," was the undaunted reply. "I am willing, even anxious, uncle, to obtain your consent to my marriage, but I shall never sacrifice my happiness, and



that of Mr Lorraine, from a mistaken sense of duty. I will wait a reasonable period in the hope of gaining your approval, and then, with it or without it, I shall marry!"

"We'll see about that!" said the Earl. "You are not of age yet, my lady, and the law may give me more power over you than you imagine!"

Geraldine replied only by a smile, and swept from the apartment.

Anger and indignation struggled for the mastery in her gentle breast as she regained her room.

That her lover should have been refused admission to the house, perhaps even with disrespect by the lacquey, filled her soul with emotions to which she had hitherto been a stranger.

She flung herself upon the couch, giving way to a burst of tears, which relieved her aching brain, and then she arose, wrote a brief note of explanation to Walter, and attired herself for a walk.

She would not order the carriage lest the Earl, in his present state of excitement, should countermand her order. She resolved to drop her letter in the nearest letter-box, and then hasten to Lady Rosenbury for counsel and consolation.

Her simple street toilet was soon completed. A lace shawl draped her slender figure, and her pale face was concealed by a veil, and with the letter in her pocket she descended the stairs.

In the corridor below she was met by the Earl.

"I thought you intended going out?" he said, grimly. "Perhaps you are going to your lover's studio?"

Geraldine flushed, answering,—

"I have not lost my delicacy, uncle, if you have. I am going to see Lady Rosenbury."

"Ah, very well," responded the Earl, moving from her path. "I am glad to hear that. It is true, I suppose, that Lady Rosenbury likes Walter Lorraine? But she cannot prefer him to her son, let Rosenbury say what he will. And Rosenbury is at home to-day, I believe. Go on, child, but do not go without attendance."

"I prefer going alone," replied the maiden. "I need no attendant, the distance being short."

She bowed formally, and left the house. Meanwhile, the indignant artist had wended his way to the Rosenbury mansion, where he found Lady Rosenbury awaiting his arrival.

"Ah, Walter!" she said, rising to welcome him. "I thought you had completely forgotten me. You have been home two whole days, at least, and yet have not come to see me until now!"

"I have not been in a mood to intrude upon you, dear Lady Rosenbury," replied Walter. "I have been anxious and troubled."

"But you used always to come to me in your boyish troubles, my dear Walter, as if I had been your own mother. But what can trouble or annoy you now? I supposed that you and Geraldine were the most blissful of mortals. Come and sit down by me, Walter, and tell me all about it. Do your troubles spring from a want of the root of all evil?" If so, you know well that my purse is at your service. You will only be drawing upon your own future stores, my dear boy, in taking from my purse!"

Walter pressed her ladyship's hand to his lips, and said,—

"I am not worthy of so much love and kindness—"

"You must let me be the judge of that," interrupted her ladyship with a bright smile. "So the trouble springs from a want of money? And you suffered two whole days of anxiety to pass without coming to me—your adopted mother?"

She said the last sentence reproachfully.

Again Walter pressed her hand to his lips, and he answered,—

"I have not needed money, dear Lady Rosenbury. If I had I should not have

hesitated to come to you. My trouble was about Lady Geraldine."

"What, not a love quarrel, Walter?"

"No, your ladyship. I will explain to you the whole affair."

He proceeded to do so, detailing the remarks he had made when giving the ring to Geraldine on the rocky coast by the sea, and relating the events of the preceding day.

"And that was the cause of your paleness, Walter, last evening!" said her ladyship. "No wonder you looked ill. The affair looks plain to me. Doubtless the Earl listened behind the rocks and heard you tell Geraldine that she had only to send back the ring to be freed from her engagement. He had a ring made, the fac-simile of Geraldine's, though how he obtained hers is a mystery. Perhaps Geraldine might enlighten us on that point. You must be guarded against any attempts at estrangement in the future."

"And your ladyship really approves of our engagement?" asked Walter. "I have feared once or twice that you might deem me presumptuous in aspiring to the hand of an Earl's daughter."

"You are worthy of her!" declared Lady Rosenbury, with some emotion. "You are fitted for each other, and will be very happy together. How Lord Rosenbury used to love you! Somehow, he and Raymond never got on together, any more than I get on with Raymond now."

The door of the boudoir opened abruptly, and Rosenbury entered. He passed just within the door, surveying the group, with a countenance convulsed with baleful passions.

The sharpest pang that rent his heart, as he stood there glaring upon them, was caused by his knowledge of the holy but unsuspected relation existing between them—the knowledge that they were mother and son.

Had he but been the rightful heir, and Walter Lorraine only the son of the gardener, Rosenbury would not then have cared how much affection her ladyship bestowed upon the artist. But as the case stood, every affectionate word that was uttered by one of them to the other seemed to threaten the discovery of their rightful relationship.

For several moments he stared at them, unable to control his rage sufficiently to speak; but at length he said, in a sneering tone,—

"I beg pardon for intruding upon such a delightful scene. I had supposed that Mr. Lorraine was devoted to Lady Geraldine Sommers—high as she is above his reach; but I had really no idea that he had become the lover of the immaculate Lady Rosenbury."

Walter sprang to his feet, quivering with indignation, while Lady Rosenbury, overwhelmed with astonishment, silently trembled at the dastardly insult.

"Lord Rosenbury," exclaimed Walter, "how dare you insult her ladyship in this manner? Remember she is your mother."

Rosenbury sneered.

"What do you mean, Raymond?" said her ladyship, finding her voice. "I cannot imagine why you should act in this unfilial manner."

Her ladyship could only look at her son in simple wonder, as she remarked,—

"Take care, Raymond. You are talking to your mother. Did I ever fail in my duty to you—in my care and love for you, that you so cruelly insult me?"

"Go, I say!" cried Rosenbury, advancing fiercely upon the young artist, who looked much less strong than himself. "I won't trouble the servants to put you out. I'll do it myself!"

Walter's eyes flashed, but he said, quietly,—

"We will not fight, Lord Rosenbury—at least, not in her ladyship's presence!"

"Sit down, Walter," she said. "Raymond must be delirious. I do not see how he can so insult his own mother if he is in his right senses!"

(To be continued.)

## A GREAT COST.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

"I TELL you I must see her, Fowler!"

"My lady is never disturbed after nine, my lord. I daren't obey her orders."

"Oh! I'll take the risk and all the scolding, too. Dear old Fowler, don't be a beastly nuisance. I tell you it's most important. I must see her ladyship at once. Besides, if it wasn't so important as it is, Grannie would always see me!"

The tall, spare waiting woman, with her quiet, grave face smiled at this. No one could withstand Lord Castleton.

"I think you mostly get your own way, my lord," she said.

"I hope I shall this time, anyhow!" the young man muttered to himself.

He threw his overcoat off, and gave it and his hat to Fowler. Urgent as was his business with his grandmother he did not permit himself to lapse even now from the wonted ceremony that always surrounded the Dowager Lady Castleton wherever she went.

Fowler took the coat and hat without further protest.

"There's no denying him," she said to herself, as she went downstairs.

Lord Castleton stood for a moment outside the closed door, and then knocked softly, and called in his pleasant, cheery voice,—

"It's me, Grannie dear. May I venture to come in? I want to speak to you rather particularly."

A silence of a moment's pause ensued, then he heard the clear, silvery voice—clear and musical yet despite its seventy odd years—that he had associated all his life with goodness and kindness.

"This is an unheard-of proceeding!" it said, and the young man thought he detected a sort of fear of eagerness in it. "Don't you know, Bertie, I never see anyone once I am gone to my room?"

"See me, dear, please," was the reply given urgently, and Lord Castleton smiled to himself as he caught the reply.

"Come in, come in, and let me know what all this means."

Lord Castleton was not slow to avail himself of the permission.

"Dear Grannie," he said, in his loving way and sincere apology written all over him, "I am awfully sorry to disturb, really awfully, but I want to see you so badly."

"Well, I am here. Look at me," the old lady answered, with a laugh.

She was well worth looking at as she sat in her chair by the table, and the light of the reading-lamp fell on her.

She was a very small old lady, delicate and dainty, like a piece of Dresden china. In her white flannel dressing-gown and old-fashioned lace-trimmed cap round her beautiful old face, framing her dark eyes and soft, white hair, she looked like some fairy godmother out of a child's picture book.

She was leaning back in her large, old-fashioned chintz covered chair, a book was open on the table beside her; but the young man was quick to see that the thoughts of the reader had been busy with memories whose sadness were now tinged with the roseate hue of hope, perhaps of joy.

"Well, my lord!" the old lady said, looking up at him quaintly, and loving him if possible more than ever for his bonny, handsome face, a true lexicon of his honest, noble heart.

"Well, and now what is this mighty subject?"

Lord Castleton paused only a moment. Then he flashed a little.

"Grannie, dear, I am afraid you will be a little surprised, perhaps shocked. It so inconvenient, but—there was nothing else to do, and—"

"This is slightly vague, Bertie," Lady Castleton said, quietly.

The young man gave himself a sort of desperate shake.

"Yes—yes, Grannie, I know it is. Only don't you see—I don't want to upset you, and—"

"I never like surprises or troubles in homoeopathic doses, Bertie, dear."

He glanced at the sweet old face, that was not quite so serene and self-reliant as usual.

"Grannie, dear," he said, suddenly, and yet hesitatingly, "she has come to you. I have brought her to-night instead of to-morrow. She needs you to-night, as she may never need you again."

Lady Castleton's face grew very pale.

"You—you are speaking of—" she stopped, "of Barbara—Aunt Margaret's little girl."

The old lady's lips quivered.

"We have yet to prove she is—your Aunt Margaret's child," she said, quietly but swiftly.

"See her for yourself, Grannie, dear. You will need no other witness but her face!" Lord Castleton spoke eagerly, eloquently.

His grandmother passed her lace handkerchief over her lips; her white, shrunken hand trembled a little.

She was not young, and it was long since she had been called upon to bear any great emotion; but the old courage and spirit was still in her heart, and in a moment she was herself again.

"Heaven grant you may be right," she said, her voice hushed and quiet. "Heaven grant it, Bertie, my dear!" Then she looked up suddenly. "But you must explain. You have brought her to-night at this late hour. What does Lady Bridgeworth think? Stay, you spoke of needing me. Is there something wrong? Tell me all, my boy; you know I prefer frank dealing."

Lord Castleton's face had grown serious, and he spoke earnestly.

"I am afraid, Grannie, dear, that there is something wrong, something very wrong. I scarcely know how to explain the situation to you. I—I was just outside Lady Bridgeworth's house about half-an-hour ago—not quite that, for we drove here direct—when I saw Barbara standing in the doorway. I had seen her come out of the door quickly, and at first I thought it was one of the maids, but as she began to walk away I—I knew at once it was Barbara. I never stopped to think. I just rushed up after her and spoke to her, and then I saw she was in some great trouble. She—she was frightened at first, but when she saw it was me, the boy's colour came back into his face, she got better immediately, and she told me she was in trouble—and—and was leaving Lady Bridgeworth's house by herself!"

Lady Castleton was leaning forward in her chair, her two slender hands holding on either side, her face keen and alive with a sort of anxious intensity.

"There must be some great reason for such an act," she said, distinctly and slowly.

"Oh! Grannie, dear," the young man cried, quickly, "there is some great—great reason. Something must have happened since I left there this afternoon. She was quite well and happy then, she was looking so beautiful. Now," his voice was not quite steady, "her face just makes my heart ache. I did not ask any questions, but I begged her to let me help her. She said she could not remain in that house, and was going to some woman she had known before; but when I asked her if she were sure of finding this woman, and I saw her lips quiver, I knew she was going on chance, and so I determined, Grannie, darling—and, oh! please don't say I have done wrong—to bring her here direct to your house, for I am convinced—yes, absolutely convinced, dear—that she has every right to be here as much as I have, and that you are the proper person to give her shelter and protection!"

Lady Castleton sank back in her chair; she was very white and very quiet. Her grandson felt a thrill of uneasiness as he looked at her.

"I have frightened you, darling Grannie. I am so sorry!"

He came and knelt beside the chair, and she pressed her hand tenderly on his bright, curly hair.

"You have startled me a little, Bertie, dear," she said, faintly. "When one gets to my years, small things appear very great, and—and this is not a small thing, my dear!"

"Forgive me, Grannie, if I have done wrong! Perhaps I—I ought not to have acted as I have done, and yet—"

Lady Castleton was silent a moment.

"You say you asked no question or explanation? You know nothing of this trouble—this strange circumstance?"

"I asked no question. I know nothing!"

There was another silence, and then Lady Castleton withdrew her caressing hand from her beloved boy's head.

"Go and bring her to me," she said, in a voice, which, though faint and low, was yet firm and clear.

Lord Castleton rose to his feet slowly.

"Are you sure it will not make you ill, dear?"

She glanced up into his loving, anxious face and smiled at him, nodded her graceful old head encouragingly.

"If," she said, slowly, "if we should be—as you think Bertie, you will have made me feel better than I have been for many and many a day. If not—"

"If not?" the young man repeated eagerly.

"If not, dear—well, I am used to disappointment, and there will always be the pleasant thought that we have done a charitable act. Your—your little Barbara shall find, I hope, a true friend in me."

"How good you are! How good!" The young man bent his head and pressed his lips to her hand. "There never was anyone so good as you, Grannie, dear!"

"Ah!" Lady Castleton said, her voice growing into its old tone with the touch of quaintness in it; "that is what we always say when we get what we want!"

"Grannie, dear!"

She put out her hand suddenly.

"I will see this child, and I will do all I can for her, whether she be my—my poor Margaret's or not; but in either case, I must be dealt with straightforwardly, and if you have asked no questions, I must."

"You will be kind to her?" The cry was involuntary, then he stopped and coloured vividly. "But what am I saying, as if you could be anything but kind? It was only because she is so unhappy, so very unhappy, Grannie, dear."

"Send her to me," Lady Castleton said gently. She smiled up into his face again; but as he turned away eagerly and left her she sighed. "My poor boy!" she said to herself wistfully; her old eyes had read his very heart of hearts. "My poor Bertie! Is your sorrow to come to you so soon?" and then she lay back in her chair with closed eyes and a strange, concentrated look on her white, worn face.

None but herself could have told what passed in her mind at the moment, what hope and fear, what joy, what dread of disappointment? It was a little lifetime of mental agitation! Would Heaven hearken to her prayer, and give her back this living memory of that beloved one whom she had mourned for in silence all these years? Was the end to be gladdened by a joy as great as it was unexpected?

The old heart beat with an eagerness, an anxiety she had never experienced for years. The boldness of character, the determination which had marked her career from the very first up to now, faltered, and seemed to fail her in this moment. She seemed to realise, for the first time, that she was only a frail old woman, and that all her pride and self-reliant will, her strength, was growing more puny every day. Her hands trembled as she caught the sound of footsteps, and heard

Bertie's voice, speaking low, eagerly, encouragingly, tenderly.

"Whether she be my Margaret's child or not, my Bertie loves her. I must befriend her for his sake, and leave the rest to Heaven!" So thought Lady Castleton as she laid back, waiting with a keen hope, an eagerness that was like a touch of her almost forgotten youth. Her eyes were closed as the door was pushed open, and the two young people came into the room.

Lord Castleton gave an anxious glance at the white, worn face. He was half-reproachful to himself for bringing so much excitement at so late an hour, and yet he could not have acted otherwise. His fingers closed round Barbara's small, cold hand in a tender, comforting fashion, and he drew her up to the chair where Lady Castleton sat.

"Grannie!" he said, hurriedly, "Grannie, dear, this is Barbara!"

Lady Castleton's face contracted for a moment, then she opened her beautiful old eyes. There was scarcely an instant's hesitation. Then there came a little cry, and the two worn hands were stretched out quivering to the girl.

"Margaret," she said, and there was joy and pain in the voice, "My dear! my beloved Margaret!"

Lord Castleton felt a mist rise suddenly over his eyes. His heart was full of a supreme gladness. It seemed to him he stood for a moment on the threshold of Heaven as he saw his grandmother fold her arms about Barbara's slender form, and draw it to her heart.

There had been no hesitation—there had not been even one second's doubt. The mother had recognised her dead child's face in the living grandchild.

Lady Castleton spoke first. Her emotion seemed to have gone. Her voice was as brisk and clear as it was wont to be.

"Call Fowler!" she said quietly, yet decisively. "Do you hear me, Bertie? Call Fowler at once!"

The young man's handsome, fresh-coloured face became pale as ashes as he caught sight of the girl for an instant.

His grandmother's arms were still supporting the clinging form, but he saw now what he had been too nervous to apprehend, that Barbara's strength was utterly spent. The last excitement had been more than she could support. Her head lay heavily on her grandmother's breast. Her eyes were closed and her cheeks, brows, and lips were as white as the dainty gown against which they rested.

He made some sort of exclamation, and Lady Castleton looked up at him sharply.

"Call Fowler!" she repeated. "Don't stand there like a post. One would imagine you had never seen a young woman in a faint before!"

Lord Castleton woke from the horrible stupor that had fallen upon him. He scarcely comprehended what dread feeling it was that had fallen upon him. He turned and rushed wildly from the room, but at the door he paused again, and looked back.

The old lady was pressing her lips to that pale, deathlike face, and her withered hand was gazing gently over the masses of red-brown hair that seemed to gleam out like threads of gold in the lamp light.

The young man turned away reverently.

"My darling!" he said, suddenly to himself. "My darling! No longer a wait and stray. You have your proper home at last!"

And then he called hurriedly for Fowler, who came quickly and quietly, putting away her spectacles, and obeying her lady's summons as though it were an everyday occurrence to be called at this late hour of the night to attend a strange young lady, who had succumbed to a fainting fit.

Excited, anxious, unstrung as he was, Lord Castleton could not help smiling at the imperious face and quiet matter-of-fact way in which this devoted Castleton servant accepted the situation.



"I do believe if the house were on fire all round Fowler would not condescend to run or be in the least surprised," he said to himself, as he watched her go into his grandmother's room, and shut the door on his eager eyes; "and I am also quite sure that no fire would be so rude or unceremonious as to attempt to annoy her!"

And then he sat down on a chair in the passage and waited for further news.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

JOSEPHINE BRIDGEWORTH passed anything but a comfortable night. She returned from her dinner party nervous and bad-tempered. She saw at once from Finn's manner that if Barbara had left the house, as she was fully prepared to find was the fact, the maid knew nothing of the matter.

She dismissed Finn sharply, and sat looking into the fire with knit brows. She hated herself in this moment; she loathed and despised herself, saw herself in her true colours, and she shrank from the sight.

The remembrance that she had leagued herself with Julian Lascelles in this most miserable wrong against the brother who had been so good to him, the man whom she had told herself she loved, was an absolute agony to her, was abhorrent to her. She felt as though someone had dragged her from her proud position and trailed her in the mud.

There was a picture of Humphrey on her mantel-shelf. She actually cowed and shrank beneath the steady, frank gaze of the pictured eyes. They seemed to go through and through her.

She looked an old, haggard woman as she sat there alone, the hands of her clock ticking past the hour of midnight.

Had her knowledge of Barbara failed again? Was the girl really gone—or and for an instant her heart beat with an eagerness and hope that was surprising to herself—or was she still beneath her roof?

If so, the path might be made easy. It needed only a little confession, not the true one, but some other that would serve the purpose, and—she would be saved from worse than she had done. She would stand again secure in her own eyes. She would wash herself free of Julian and his smooth, easy treachery.

She almost cursed Julian. It seemed to her, in this moment of communion with the situation, that she would never have done what she had done, but for him. He was the devil who had led her on; and, after all, though she had acted with him, it was his hand who had written the letter, his brain that had suggested it.

Josephine rose and paced to and fro. The suspense, the uncertainty, were becoming unbearable. By now the servants must be safely asleep. She must go and see for herself if Barbara were really close at hand.

"What a coward I am!" she said to herself, bitterly, between her teeth. "What a coward!"

She must go cautiously. Under ordinary circumstances it would not matter if she were seen going to Barbara's room; indeed, it would be only the most natural thing, considering the girl's supposititious headache.

But Josephine, uneasy as she was, had still her wits about her. She must not risk being seen in case—the girl was really gone! It would look so odd if, seeing the room empty and Miss Vereker nowhere to be found, she should make no disturbance or inquiry on the subject. No, coward or not, she must be cautious, above all things.

It was close on one o'clock before she left her room and stole softly in the direction of Barbara's.

She paused outside the door for one instant, her heart beating so loud in her ears as almost to deafen her, then—boldly turned the handle, and entered the room. She felt faint and cold

as she realised the fulfilment of her worldly knowledge.

Barbara was indeed gone! A tiny jet of gas was burning in the old-fashioned bracket. The fire was dead in the grate. By the dim light Josephine could see the bed had never been touched.

She walked up to the gas and increased the light. She looked curiously about her with a strange, mechanical curiosity. Her thoughts were swift and clear. She took in the whole situation as she stood there. She almost seemed to see the girl in her silent, hurried preparation for her departure.

Her eyes turned to the table where lay the trinkets Barbara had taken off. She looked about her. Nothing was gone but just what would be absolutely necessary.

"She has taken nothing he gave—nothing!" the cold, pale woman said to herself.

Her remorse was keener, more acute, as she stood there and realised the proud spirit and courage of this girl.

She had called herself proud, she had gloried in her iron will and pride many a time; but she saw herself as a pigmy, as a mere nothing beside this girl's nature—this poor, puny thing, as she had called her so contemptuously; and then, for a moment, a great fear swept over Josephine Bridgeworth's selfish, worldly heart.

What had become of the girl; where had she gone! She was alone in the world, she had no friends, she had no one to whom she could turn in her distress, and the streets of London was a cruel refuge to such a girl as Barbara.

She shivered and grew colder. What had she done? She was frightened. If there should be an awful exposure, if Barbara were found dead on the morrow, and it was traced to her that—she shuddered again. Then by a strong, an almost superhuman effort, she put aside these thoughts. She turned down the gas and left the room, touching nothing, moving nothing.

"There will be some word in the morning," she said to herself. "She will send me word of some sort. She has no cause for quarrelling with me. I do not expect news of her whereabouts, but she will let me know something! Oh! yes, there will be a letter in the morning!"

She said this to herself over and over again, yet she knew, while she said it, that she had no ground for supposing or expecting it. Barbara had gone utterly and entirely. If she had intended to leave any word something would have been found either in her own room or in that silent deserted chamber that seemed to Lady Bridgeworth in her present agitated, nervous, condition to be like some cold, quiet tomb.

It was almost morning before she flung herself on to her bed and sank into a heavy, dreamless sleep, and when she awoke the hour was late, and her maid was in the room bearing her letters.

In an instant Josephine's wits were keenly alive. She was herself again, her cold, imperious self. She tossed the letters over. There was nothing in Barbara's writing nor in Muriel's; but it would be scarcely possible to hear from Muriel till late in the day. Josephine's fine brows met as she tore open a note from Julian Lascelles.

It was brief, and to the point.

"I am waiting your instructions, also report as to success or failure, of yesterday's work."

She set her lips firmly; the weakness that had assailed her in the night was gone with the morning light; but the disgust for her collaborator was, if possible, greater than ever. She felt so absolutely humiliated that another human being, and such another, should have probed into her heart of hearts, have become linked with her most inward desires, have stripped aside her cold, proud bearing, and become master of the situation, laughing at her contemptuously, no doubt, for her folly and treachery.

She crushed his note in her hand suddenly, and almost registered a vow that from that moment she would have no more to say to Julian; but even in the mere thought of this she checked herself. If Julian had fathomed her nature, she was keen and clever enough to know him entirely, and she knew that he was not a man with whom she could play. He could not be cast off at a moment's notice. She had leagued herself with him, and she must use all her wits to sever herself from him without making him an enemy. She shivered involuntarily as she thought of Julian Lascelles as an enemy. The picture was not a pleasant one.

While she was dressing Finn came in hurriedly to report Barbara's strange absence.

Lady Bridgeworth was quite prepared for this.

"What are you saying, Finn? Miss Vereker not in her room? Well, she has gone down to breakfast most probably. You know you called me half-an-hour late this morning!"

"The bed has not been slept in, my lady!" the maid said hurriedly, in a troubled fashion. Barbara, like Muriel, had a way of captivating every servant, and Finn was honestly disturbed and anxious.

"Not slept in!" repeated Lady Bridgeworth, looking over her silver hand glass with which she was surveying her hair. "What do you mean?"

Finn repeated the words.

"And I find Miss Vereker's hat and coat is gone from the wardrobe; and"—Finn's eyes had a suspicious moisture in them—"and her little diamond heart and ring and bangle that she never takes off are all lying on the table. My lady, I'm afraid—"

"Of what are you afraid?" queried Lady Bridgeworth, coldly. "Please don't indulge in hysterics, Finn. I object to that sort of thing, as you know. Give me my dressing-gown. I will go and see!"

But before Josephine could proceed on her search there came an interruption. It was in the shape of a note brought up to the bedroom—a note written in a fine old-fashioned hand directed to "Lady Bridgeworth," with "immediate" in the left-hand corner, and looking important.

Josephine knew the writing slightly. She had received one or two letters from Lady Castleton before.

Her brows contracted. Her woman's intuition warned her that in some way this letter was connected with the crisis of the moment; but she was not, it is needless to say, prepared for the news it contained.

"DEAR LADY BRIDGEWORTH," it ran,—

"I should be exceedingly obliged if you would do me the favour to come and see me as soon as possible. I wish to speak with you on a matter very important to me; but, firstly, I must set your mind at rest regarding the whereabouts of my dear grandchild, Barbara Vereker, who, I find, left your house last night in a somewhat unconventional manner."

"She is here in my safe-keeping, having come direct to me on leaving your home; and, as it is on her mind that she is causing you considerable pain and uneasiness, I hasten to let you know without delay that the child is in safety."

"The other matter I have to deal with must be dealt with personally."

"Please forgive this, I fear, untimely, and certainly unceremonious call on your courtesy. The urgency of my need must be my excuse, and my age will, I am sure, plead for me in that. I ask you to come to me instead of presenting myself at your house."

There were a few more old-fashionedly turned sentences, and the letter ended.

Josephine stood looking down at it as in a dream.

"My dear grandchild, Barbara Vereker," she read over and over again with her brows



LADY CASTLETON'S ARMS WERE SUPPORTING THE CLINGING FORM. BARBARA'S STRENGTH WAS UTTERLY SPENT.]

knit, and a curious, cold sensation creeping over her.

What strange, what horrible turn of fortune was this? How was she to act? What might not lie in store for her?

Barbara, the grandchild of Theresa Lady Castleton!—the sharp, clever caustic-tongued Lady Castleton—whose pride and straightforwardness were proverbial!

The room seemed to fade away from Josephine's clear, cold eyes for a moment. She put out her hand and grasped a chair. Visions of the most humiliating, miserable, disastrous future floated before her.

She saw herself publicly disgraced and her treachery proclaimed on the housetop by Barbara, a scion of the Castleton family. Barbara, the wif and stray, safe in the protection of those who owned her by ties of blood, and who would avenge her wrong as their own.

The news was too overwhelming, too awful. She felt the very heart within her grow faint and sick.

But if there was cruelty and treachery in Josephine Bridgeworth's nature, if there was unnatural jealousy and hatred, there was not lacking courage.

She had called herself a coward the night before; but beyond the fact that all treachery and mean dealing is cowardly, Josephine was not a coward—her courage, her will, her determination was tremendous. A glimpse at her maid's face recalled her almost immediately to herself.

"Give me some eau de cologne, Finn," she said, sharply. "I have one of my bad headaches."

"Will you go back to bed, my lady?" the maid suggested, longing to know what was to be done in the case of Barbara.

She could not rid her mind of the fact that something was wrong.

"To bed? No," Lady Bridgeworth said, still sharply. "You gave me a fright about Miss Vereker. I could not make out what you meant; and when this letter came from Lady

Castleton, telling me Miss Vereker had gone in there after early service this morning, and complains of feeling ill, and desires to see me, it made my head worse—that's all."

Finn stood by very quietly, and murmured a "yes, my lady," as if this explanation was more than explicit; but, as a matter of fact, the maid was bewildered and surprised.

She had never seen her mistress in this strange condition of mind before. It was true that Lady Bridgeworth did occasionally succumb to a bad headache; but these occasions were very rare, and the symptoms were more accentuated than was apparent now.

"Something's wrong!" was Finn's inward remark.

She was considerably relieved to hear that no ill had happened to Barbara; but she was more convinced than ever that something unusual had occurred, and she was not in the least deceived by Josephine's little fiction about Miss Vereker attending early morning service.

"She never slept in that bed—she went away last night," Finn said to herself. "There must have been something very wrong when Miss Barbara takes off her ring, and her diamond heart, and her bangle, and leaves them behind."

Josephine, looking up sharply, caught the expression on her maid's face.

"Give me my tweed gown, and get out my sealskin and hat," she said, rising to her feet.

"I must go to Miss Vereker at once!"

"Shall I order the carriage, my lady?"

"No. I will take a hansom."

Josephine was to all intents and purposes her cool, curt self.

"I will have breakfast when I return; that is," with a sudden recollection of her superstitious illness, "if my headache is sufficiently better to let me eat anything."

Finn assisted her mistress to dress in silence; and Josephine looked her usual self, perhaps a trifle pale, when she went downstairs.

A telegraph boy was just on the step as she was going to her hansom.

Her quick eye saw him, and her quick hand took his orange-coloured missive before the butler could touch it.

An intuition had warned her this might come. She put the telegram in her muff, having first read Barbara's name on the envelope. As she drove away she tore it open. It was from Muriel.

"Am so dreadfully disappointed, no letter from you. Surely you have forgiven me, darling? H. is longing to hear from you; H. sends his fondest love, is a little better; but will not be well till he sees you again. Write to me, dear, I entreat, or telegraph reply. "MURIEL."

Josephine set her lips very tight.

Muriel's little scribbled note then must have been fully explicit. Julian had said as much had Barbara received it.

Lady Bridgeworth could not repress the one wild sort of despairing wish that Barbara had received it.

True, the plot had worked marvellously—almost better than could have been imagined; but, though she might scheme and arrange all the other points she could not deal with this new move that threatened to give her some moments of acute discomfort, if even the worst did not happen.

What action would Lady Castleton take? What would have come to pass during the next twenty-four hours?

It was a problem, Lady Bridgeworth said to herself, as she alighted at the Castleton House, and entered the spacious hall, beyond even her extraordinary sharp wits to solve. She had nothing to guide her by, nothing to cling to. She could only trust to chance.

(To be continued.)

ONLY one person in eight thousand dies of old age.





["MAUDE! FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE EXPLAIN!" EXCLAIMED LOVEL CLINTON. "THERE MUST BE SOME TERRIBLE MISTAKE!"]

NOVELS BY THE

## A FOOLISH YOUNG COUPLE.

### CHAPTER I.

THE scene was the cosy dining-room of a very small suburban house. The fire burnt brightly, the table was nicely, and even elegantly arranged; but the two people seated at it had not brought to the meal the contented mind compared by the wise man to a continual feast.

They were both as cross as they well could be, and the misfortune of it was that this was not their first quarrel—no, nor yet their sixth or seventh—though they had only been married about three months, and had certainly been, or believed themselves to be, desperately in love with each other.

It had not been a runaway match, or a very rash marriage.

Lovel Clinton had a very snug post in the office of a London newspaper. His income was three hundred a-year, and might soon become more.

Maude Rossitur was the daughter of a country clergyman, richer in children and piety than in money.

So it came about that his second daughter, being clever, had to earn her bread, and became junior teacher in a high school for girls, not three miles from the suburban villa before referred to.

Lovel and Maude met at the house of a mutual friend, were introduced, and fell in love with each other on the spot.

They were married after a six months' engagement, which gave time for Lovel to be received as a relative at the rural Vicarage, and for his betrothed to offer the school authorities the full three months' notice, to which they were entitled.

Then there had been a modest wedding at Dalberg church, and after a week spent in

Scotland the young couple came "home" to Rosemary Villa, West Ledworth, and fairly settled down as married people.

But unfortunately Mrs. Rossitur, with the best intentions (it seems to me all the fatal mistakes of life are committed with the best intentions) had given her daughter a parting warning, which was destined to do much to mar the domestic peace of Rosemary Villa.

"You know, Maude," said the good lady, who had brought up ten children on a smaller income than the one her son-in-law possessed at the present moment, "you are a very lucky girl; and it is not every man in Lovel's position who would have chosen a wife without a penny. Do try and get domesticated, my dear, and leave off your studious habits. It was very different when you had to earn your living by teaching, but now your chief object ought to be to make your husband comfortable."

Ill omened advice. Maude, who had spent her girlhood in cramming for examinations, and her last three years in cramming other people, considered learning the one thing needful in life, and perfectly despised the more homely qualities recommended by her mother.

Still she was very much in love, and but for that unlucky suggestion of Mrs. Rossitur's she might have tried to busy herself with domestic matters.

But, alas! the charming young lady possessed a rather contradictory temper, and her defects being pointed out to her, was the very way to make her continue them.

"I'm sure I never asked him to marry me!" she thought, contemptuously; "and as to being so very lucky, if I had waited I dare say I should have met someone much richer. I don't see why I should be so very 'grateful' to Lovel for condescending to marry me!"

Fortunately for Mr. Clinton's peace of mind, though his wife despised trifles, she had an intense horror of debt. She would have starved rather than buy anything she could

not pay for; and she had the sense to know that if she did not take an active part in household affairs herself, she must get some one who could, or else live in a perpetual muddle. It followed, therefore, that a very respectable widow was engaged as general factotum, and Mr. and Mrs. Clinton had no cause to complain of their choice.

Rosemary Villa was kept in a state of immaculate order. There was no waste and no stint.

Mrs. Reeves required twenty pounds a-year for her services; but there is no doubt they were quite worth that to her employers in point of comfort.

But, oh! the reproaches, the scandal, the excitement Mrs. Reeves caused in West Ledworth.

Rosemary Villa was situated in a cheerful road, where most of the houses being of the same size and status it fell out that everyone knew a great deal about everyone else.

Lovel had lived there for three years, and knew about a score of families, whose means were, perhaps, similar to his own, and who thought a "girl" the summit of their requirements.

"They do say," said Mrs. Carrington, next door, to Miss Grimly opposite, "Mrs. Clinton is that stuck-up she won't even go inside her own kitchen. What can there be to do in that bit of a house with everything new; and yet she must needs have a grand housekeeper, who wears a silk dress on Sundays! She'll bring her husband to the workhouse in no time!"

But Miss Grimly, whose nature was milder than her name, dissented.

"They do say young Mrs. Clinton is very clever, and perhaps she works hard at something else than housekeeping. She's not extravagant in other things, and she's always a pleasant word for anyone."

"Has she!" retorted Mrs. Carrington. "Why, when I ran over the first morning they were, home just to be neighbourly, she sent out

word she was engaged, and I've been told since she never does see anyone who calls in the morning, be it who it may."

And Maude's unsociableness was the cause of quarrel number one. Lovel, who had spent his bachelor days in lodgings in that very street, and knew many people could not understand why his wife would not receive the advances of his neighbours more graciously.

"It must be so dull for you, Maude," he said, kindly. "With me away from nine to six, I should have thought you would be glad of a little company."

"I like to choose my company, Lovel. There is no one in this road with an idea in her head beyond servants and babies!"

"Well, you can't have the world full of Girtton girls," said Lovel, rather crossly, which was a decided snub, for Maude's proudest ambition had been to be a Girtton girl herself, only poverty had nipped the aspiration in the bud.

"Well, women might have a little sense."

"The people about here have a great deal, and are very nice and neighbourly. When my mother stayed with me in the spring, she said she wouldn't wish for a pleasanter set of acquaintances."

"Her tastes are old-fashioned, perhaps?"

"She is a lady!" said Lovel, rather hotly, "and an educated woman, even if she doesn't despise everyone who isn't blue!"

Of course Maude retorted, and that was quarrel number one. Number two was on the subject of a reading society to which Mrs. Clinton wished to belong, and her husband objected on the grounds that the meetings were held two miles off, and he came home too tired to care to go so far in search of amusement.

Quarrels three and four were on trivial subjects; and, alas! by that time the habit of squabbling was so firmly established that Mr. and Mrs. Clinton had "a few words" on every occasion.

Maude thought private marriage was a very great mistake, and she would have been far happier had she remained a form-mistress at the Ledworth High School, with ninety pounds a year and independence; while Lovel recalled all the warnings of his old friends when they heard he was engaged to a 'learned lady,' and began to fear, dimly, there had been more in their condolences than he had believed.

Now Mr. Clinton, though nominally engaged in literary pursuits, was not a clever or imaginative man. He was sub-editor of the *Fleet Street Chronicle*, but he never wrote a line in its columns.

His duties consisted chiefly in seeing the numerous people who wished to interview the editor, and sifting from the crowd the few who really had any business with the chief.

He also conveyed the editor's sentences to his contributors in strictly businesslike letters, couched in the third person. He received all communications, and waded through them, selecting the most important for his superior's perusal.

He was a most useful man, and having been gifted by nature with a handsome face, by habit with a pleasant, courteous manner, he was deservedly popular with all chance callers.

He served the office honestly, and earned his salary fairly; but he had spent five years as a sub-editor without needing the slightest scrap of literary ability, and, as a fact, he possessed none.

Such being the case, it is hardly surprising he misunderstood his wife. He thought Maude the dearest girl in the world, but he was genuinely afraid of her cleverness, and hoped, by a judicious course of ignoring all intellectual topics and pursuits, to bring the gifted, high-spirited woman he had married to the same dead level of narrow-mindedness as his own female relations.

Poor Maude! Perhaps she was not so much to blame for the quarrels as she seemed,

for pretty as was Rosemary Villa, admirable as was the comfort of its *ménage*, the mistress of the little house was terribly, frightfully dull.

After a life of hard work, first as pupil then as teacher, to find herself from morning to night with no duties whatever was an alarming experience.

She was fond of music, but she could not afford to buy new songs or pieces repeatedly, so an hour's practice generally contented her.

She was clever at needlework, but her new trousseau left her no scope for this talent, and Lovel having invested in a complete new wardrobe just before his wedding, none of his garments needed mending.

Poor Maude! There was not a creature within reach she cared to visit, except the Head-Mistress of the High School and her late fellow-teachers. But as their hours of leisure were precisely the same as Lovel's—and he hated his wife out of the house when he was in it—it came about that the relaxation of a chat with them was denied to the young bride.

For six weeks she moped hopelessly. Her bright eyes grew dull and lustreless. She could hardly get through her days, so endless did they seem. Then a new idea seized her. She said nothing to anyone, but Lovel could not but see the change.

Her old spirits returned. She went laughing and singing about the house; and Mr. Clinton, who was not a very far-seeing man, decided that his system had succeeded, and his pretty wife had at last bent her proud neck contentedly to the yoke of domestic life.

And this brings us to the dull November morning when the pair sat at breakfast, and unfortunately drifted into the quarrel before alluded to.

It came about so innocently. Things had been going much more smoothly of late, and really Mr. and Mrs. Clinton both seemed inclined to compete for the far-famed Dunmow fitch of bacon, and now a mere trifle destroyed their seeming harmony.

"By the way, Maude," said Clinton, putting down a letter he had been reading, "my mother is staying with Jane, and she says they will both run over this morning and have dinner with you."

"I am very sorry, Lovel, but I shall not be at home this morning."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mr. Clinton, cheerfully. "You know you can't have anything to do but what can be put off."

"I am sorry your opinion of my engagements is so poor, but I repeat I shall not be at home this morning. If relations deem it correct to come over uninvited they should at least give their hosts timely notice."

Lovel winced. He was quite aware that Maude in his own language did not "hit it off" with his mother and Jane. He could believe they rather liked the idea of taking her by surprise, but all his hospitable ideas were outraged by the bare thought of refusing their visit.

"You'll stay at home, won't you, Maude?" he said, persuasively. "You see, mother is getting old, and—"

"Brixton is no distance," replied Maude, coolly. "If Mrs. Clinton had told me she was staying there I would have written and asked her to come over."

"People don't stand on ceremony with their relations," retorted Lovel, crossly.

"Precisely. And as your mother has waived all ceremony in inviting herself I am at liberty to do the same. I shall not be at home this morning, Lovel; and I will leave you to decide whether Mrs. Clinton would prefer us to stop her visit by telegram, or to suffer her to arrive at an empty house."

"I shall certainly not telegraph," he said, curtly. "It is your duty to remain at home."

Maude smiled a little scornfully.

"As Mrs. Clinton did not trouble herself to write to me it is not my place to let her know her visit is inconvenient."

And so the quarrel waged. In the end of it

Lovel banged the door, and went off to Fleet-street a good half-hour before his time, leaving his wife without deigning to tell her whether he should telegraph to his mother or no.

Maude had a good cry when her lord and master had departed. Then she dried her eyes, took up a local time-table, and tried to ascertain at what hour her relations by marriage might be expected.

Chance assisted her speculations, since no train left Brixton for West Ledworth between a quarter to twelve and one, which only reached the latter station at one o'clock, the precise hour of early dinner at Rosemary Villa.

"They will come by the 11.45," decided Maude, "and get here soon after twelve. Of course, I can't be at home, but I do wish it hadn't been so. I shouldn't mind Jane, but Mrs. Clinton is so interfering."

Which was strictly true. Among the many voices raised to warn Lovel of the dangers of marrying a blue-stocking his mother's had been the loudest.

The mistake once committed she had tried to remedy it by the generous offer of coming to reside with the young couple, and undertaking all domestic management.

This self-sacrificing offer was refused, but the fact that it had been made did not render Mrs. Clinton, senior, any more a favourite with her daughter-in-law.

There was nothing petty in Maude's nature. She did not like Lovel's "people," but she never resented his helping them according to his means. She was perfectly aware that "Jane," the careworn wife of a struggling City clerk, rarely had things in comfort at home; and so she summoned Mrs. Reeves, and between them a tempting little dinner was soon arranged.

"It is just possible your master may remember to put them off," Maude explained simply to her servant. "If not, they will be here soon after twelve."

"And when shall you be home, ma'am?" inquired Mrs. Reeves, who was a devoted believer in her young mistress.

"I really don't know," said young Mrs. Clinton, frankly. "I shall try and get back by three, because the afternoons are so dark and foggy. But I may be detained, so you had better not tell Mrs. Trimble and her mother any particular time."

"Very well, ma'am."

She was a very pretty girl, this brown-eyed bride, whom Lovel had brought home so proudly in the summer, and there was a certain quiet dignity about her which made her look older than her two-and-twenty years.

She had been the only one in the band of High-School teachers without the peculiar stamp which comes in time to women who pass their lives in teaching and controlling others.

There was nothing groovy or narrow in Maude Clinton; only having been used to independence she had in character, face, eye, and in her whole appearance a dash of determination which might degenerate into obstinacy in time.

She was very nicely dressed. She had saved money, and a rich relation had come down besides with a handsome cheque and a set of furs as his contribution to the trousseau.

He was only Mr. Rossiter's distant cousin, but he was Maude's godfather, and had taken a fancy to the girl because her love of independence pleased and amused him.

A bad attack of gout had kept him away from the wedding, and being a great traveller he was but seldom at the handsome house at Sarbiton, which was his nominal home; hence it arose that he and Lovel Clinton had never met.

Maude dressed herself in her long sealskin coat and small, soft fitting toque to match. She put her hands into her tiny muff, hung a neat Russia leather bag on her arm, and was ready to start.

Mrs. Reeves betrayed not the slightest curiosity. Her mistress had made more



than one of these strange expeditions to London in the last month, and anyone less inquisitive than the old servant would have remarked that she never mentioned them to her husband—that she never returned laden with purchases, as is often the case with young ladies who make brief visits to the gay metropolis; and, lastly, that she could hardly have enjoyed any friend's hospitality, since she invariably returned with a fine healthy appetite.

"I don't like the looks of the weather, ma'am," said Reeves, respectfully, as she held open the door. "I suppose you couldn't possibly put off your journey till to-morrow?"

"I couldn't put it off for twenty pounds, Reeves," Maude said, gaily. "Have a good fire in the dining-room, and be sure you tell Mrs. Clinton, if she comes, that I am sorry I could not stay at home."

Reeves went back to her kitchen with a thoughtful face. Her lack of curiosity in Maude's doings arose from no want of interest in her mistress.

The widow had been a good deal tossed about of late years, and Rosemary Villa was quite a haven of peace to her; but she was not blind, and she could see perfectly the little cloud between the wedded pair.

Reeves inclined to her lady's side. She was a keen-witted woman, and she guessed the struggle Mrs. Clinton had to settle down into a domestic housewife; also she decidedly objected to Lovel's air of superiority.

"Men are not up to much, even the best of 'em!" moralised the old woman; "and I believe he dislikes her being clever, just because he isn't troubled that way himself. He's jealous of her brains, and she wears of his friends—that's what it is!"

## CHAPTER II.

THERE is generally an unlucky member in most families, and Jane Trimble was the unfortunate one among the Clintons. In reality twelve months younger than her brother Lovel, she looked years his senior. At seventeen she was a pretty girl without much force of character, and she had fallen in love with the only son of a bank manager, when all promised well for their marriage life.

Though not clever, John Trimble was plodding and industrious, and devoted to his bride. For three years all went merrily, then John's father absconded with some of the Bank property, was arrested, and would have been put on his trial, but that death mercifully intervened.

Poor Jane Trimble! Though no fault of their own, she and her husband had a black cross set against their name. Most of their relations had lost money through the bank failure.

There was no pity for them in their native town; and when they migrated to London the Vicar of Westfield was thought a very condescending man, because he gave John a letter of introduction to a brother of his own, junior partner in a large city firm.

John got taken on as clerk, but the salary was so small that, though it had been raised three times in his eight years of service, it now only reached a hundred a year.

Maude Clinton did not know this.

Lovel never quite forgave Jane for her husband's loss of position. Part of their mother's income had been carried away in the bank failure.

The remaining daughters were pinched in toilets and amusements. Lovel said little, but there was a coolness between him and the Trimbles, and though Brixton and West Ledworth were but five miles apart, visits were rarely exchanged.

Poor Jane! If Maude had only known it, she was not to blame for the sudden invasion of Rosemary Villa.

"Don't you think Lovel's wife might like a day's notice?" suggested Mrs. Trimble, timidly, as her parent wrote the letter which

brought about the quarrel at Rosemary Villa.

"If she can't keep her house presentable with that expensive servant it's more shame for her; and, with three hundred a-year she ought not to keep such a bare larder that she'd have nothing to set before us!"

Jane winced. Meals at her house were so carefully calculated that an unexpected guest would have wrought the direst confusion.

"I like Maude," she said, thinking to change the subject; "she always looks so neat and trim."

"Ah, she knows how to spend my boy's money, there's no question about that. As to saving it, that's quite another matter."

Well, they started—the plump, well-preserved widow of fifty turned, and she this, anxious woman of twenty-eight, who looked so worn and troubled, and whose carefully turned black merino showed signs of mending. They came by the very train Maude had anticipated, and reached Rosemary Villa about an hour after its mistress had left home.

"Out!" exclaimed Mrs. Clinton, the bugles on her bonnet positively shaking with indignation. "Out! I never heard of such a thing! Why, I wrote yesterday to say we were coming!"

Reeves felt a great pity for herself. She had never seen old Mrs. Clinton before, but she "took her measure," as she would have termed it, and was pretty sure she was desperately offended.

"If you please, ma'am," she explained, civilly, "Mrs. Clinton was obliged to go out. My master promised to telegraph to you; but in case he forgot it, mistress ordered dinner for one o'clock, and said I was to keep a good fire in the dining-room. It's beautifully warm in there if you and Mrs. Trimble will step in."

"I think we had better," said Jane, pleasantly. Then, as she followed her mother through the little hall, she whispered, "I daresay the telegram came after we had started."

"I call it all an insult," said the old lady, putting her feet on the fender, and glaring disapprovingly at the ruddy glow. "And what extravagance to have such a fire in an empty room!"

"Dinner will be ready at one," announced Reeves, politely. "Would you like to go upstairs, ladies, and take off your things?"

But both declined. Mrs. Clinton, because she would not leave the fire (though she had denounced it was extravagant), and Jane, because there seemed to her something impertinent in going to Maude's room without her express invitation.

"When will your mistress be in?" demanded Mrs. Clinton, when Reeves brought in dinner.

"She said it was uncertain, ma'am. She hoped to come by the three o'clock; but she thought it might turn foggy, and the train be delayed."

"Then she has gone to London?" Reeves hated the questioner, but she had no choice as to the answer.

"I believe so, ma'am!"

"To London! And you actually speak as though she were in the habit of going constantly!"

"Not constantly, ma'am!" explained Reeves, horrified at the tone of the speaker. "My mistress has been more than once, and she has come back each time by the five o'clock train."

"Ugh!" Mrs. Clinton was not mollified. "I should have thought there were enough shops here for her to fritter away her husband's money at!"

Dinner dragged wearily, but it was through at last. Mrs. Trimble felt a strange desire to get away before Maude returned. She dreaded her mother's meeting her with such remarks as those with which she had treated Reeves.

"See, mamma," she observed, quietly, "it is clouding over, and there will be a thick fog

soon. Don't you think we had better catch the next train?"

"No, I don't," snapped Mrs. Clinton. "Here I am, and here I mean to stay until my son comes home!"

"But, Lovel will not be here till five, and I want to get back to baby!"

"Baby can do without you, or you may start at once, and I can follow when I please. I am not in my dotage yet."

She was a terrible woman when put out, and she was decidedly put out to-day. Used to a good deal of honour from her own children, Maude's rebellion was a surprise to her.

In Mrs. Clinton's opinion her daughter-in-law ought to have been pleased to give up any engagement for the sake of a visit from her husband's family.

Three o'clock came—the fog deepened. By half-past three you could not see across the road.

Jane fancied her mother was asleep, and stole out of the dining-room hoping to discover Mrs. Reeves, and take counsel with her.

"Come in, ma'am," said the woman, civilly, when Mrs. Trimble knocked at the kitchen door. "You're getting fidgety about the weather, no doubt; but it's almost a straight line to the station, and I could walk it blindfold. When the mistress comes home I am sure she will spare me to go to the station with you."

"It isn't that," Jane was trembling strangely. "But do you think my sister-in-law has met with an accident? It is nearly four o'clock, and you expected her much sooner."

"She may have been detained. Anyway, she'll be here soon, ma'am. The master's due at five; and never yet has he come home and found her out of the house."

Jane took comfort.

"I wish we had not come," she said regretfully. "You see my mother made so sure of finding your mistress at home. We had picked up the idea she rarely went out at all."

"More she does, ma'am—not enough to keep her in health, as I have made bold to tell her myself before now. I've wished now and again she'd have one of her sisters to stay with her. It's dreary for a young lady to be so much alone."

"I did not know she had any sisters!"

"A clear half-dozen, ma'am, and I ought to know, having been born and bred in Mr. Rossett's parish myself. It was he married me to my husband a dozen years ago. I didn't think then I should ever take service with one of his little girls."

The kitchen was so much more cheerful than the dining-room that Jane Trimble would not have objected to a chair there for the rest of the afternoon; but, suddenly, she heard her mother's voice calling her imperatively.

"Jane, Jane! Come here this minute!"

Mrs. Clinton had woke up to find the fire grown dull, and the daylight almost gone. She had hurriedly sought about for a match to light the candles on the mantelpiece.

In her haste she had knocked over a dainty little basket which slung on three legs like a gipsy-kettle, forming an elegant (though certainly unsteady) work-table.

All its contents were scattered on the ground; and, in picking them up, Mrs. Clinton discovered the true cause of her daughter-in-law's sudden journey to London.

Among the pieces of silk and flannel, among the labyrinths of tapes and cottons, was a half-sheet of notepaper folded in two.

An honourable woman would have replaced it without ever thinking of what it might be; but Mrs. Clinton would have asked what mother of an only son ever was strictly honourable where that son's wife was concerned?

Mrs. Clinton unfolded the half-sheet of paper, and read what was written on it. The result was those imperative cries for "Jane!"

Poor Mrs. Trimble thought her mother must have had an attack of nightmare, for the widow seized her hand and held it in a vice-like pressure while she fired off such exclamations as—

"The viper!" "The false siren!" "My boy's destroyer!" "Heaven have vengeance on the sinner!"

"Mother! mother!" cried Mrs. Trimble, frightened nearly to death. "What is the matter?"

"Read this," cried the widow, thrusting a half sheet of paper into her hand.

Now, Jane Trimble, despite eight years of galling poverty, had retained almost an ultra sense of honour. Had she known to whom the paper belonged, or how it had come into her mother's possession, nothing in the world would have induced her to read it.

But she was taken unawares, too bewildered to realise more than that something was the matter. She imagined the note to be one addressed to Mrs. Clinton herself, and conveying bad news of Maude or Lovel.

In an instant she had taken in the sense of the words and understood the hard, set look on her mother's face.

"MY DEAR LITTLE MAUDIE,—

"Meet me at the old place at 12.30, and I think we can arrange what you have so much at heart. Of course you will not tell your husband. 'All's fair in love and war,' so he must be kept in the dark a little longer.—Yours always, "R. G."

A clandestine attachment, meetings with an old lover, a ruined home and blighted name; such were the conclusions Mrs. Clinton drew from the letter.

Jane Trimble was more merciful. She herself had suffered much from the world's censure—though on her husband's account, not her own—and she knew a little how undeserved it sometimes is.

Her sympathies were entirely with Maude, but she felt dimly conscious most people would adopt her mother's view.

"You must forget we have read it," she said, simply. "Remember it is a private letter, and was never meant for your eyes or mine."

"You are an idiot, Jane," said her parent, abruptly. "This letter," she clutched it passionately as she spoke, "shall not go out of my keeping until I give it into my son's. Poor, deluded boy, he will know then how miserably he has been deceived."

"It is hardly kind to tell him, mother."

"Kind!" cried Mrs. Clinton, indignantly. "Would it be kind, I wonder, to let him go on in his blindness, and actually believe that woman an angel? That is what I have heard him call her, 'my angel wife.' Ugh!"

"She may be able to explain everything," urged Jane. "Why, mother, 'R. G.' may be her grandfather."

"Both Mr. and Mrs. Rositur are orphans," said the widow, coldly, "and neither of them ever had brother or sister. I remember poor Lovel saying so when I told him he was foolish for marrying into such a large family. He said that Maude (absurd name) had no relations except her brothers and sisters."

"'R. G.' may be a lady?"

"Oh, yes! It is so like a lady's writing," said her mother, scornfully; "and 'ladies' are so likely to talk about the 'old place,' and urge a wife to desert her husband? No, Jane. This letter will open Lovel's eyes!"

"And make him miserable," thought poor Jane; but she only said, gravely,—

"I think I will leave you and go home alone, mother. John would not like me to be mixed up in a quarrel."

"Bother John!" said Mrs. Clinton. "As though a clerk on a hundred a-year had a right to any opinion in our family matters. There, do you hear that knock? One of them has come home. I only hope it is that wretched girl. Won't I talk to her!"

But it was Lovel Clinton. He left his coat and hat in the hall, and came in with the cheery question,—

"Maude, my dear, where are you?"

Mrs. Reeves, having no desire to be cross-questioned about her mistress's absence, had disappeared the moment after she had closed the door on her master.

"Your mother is here, Lovel," said Mrs. Clinton, rushing into her son's arms, which she filled, being somewhat stout. "She is your best friend, my boy, and will never desert you in the hour of adversity."

"I'm sure you're very good," said Lovel, still looking round the room as though seeking someone; "but I don't know of any adversity threatening me at present. Where's Maude?"

Mrs. Clinton pursed up her lips and sighed. Jane Trimble, who felt ready to cry, said timidly,—

"We haven't seen her yet, Lovel. I daresay she will be in soon."

"Why, this is the first time I ever found her out," exclaimed Lovel. "I can't understand it. Look at the fog. It isn't fit for a strong man to be walking in it, much less my poor little wife."

"We started before your telegram came," went on Jane, speaking very fast, as though she feared her mother would interrupt her. "Of course, Maude couldn't be expected to stay at home if she had an engagement!"

"I hoped she would be able to put it off. I don't think I ever heard what it was!"

"Poor deluded boy!" said his mother, feelingly.

Lovel looked bewildered. A man of twenty-nine does not quite care for such an address.

"Oh, hang it all!" he said, cheerfully. "I don't think I'm to be pitted. The fact is Maude comes of a very ceremonious family, who go in for written invitations, and that sort of thing. She doesn't understand our ways. Of course, I'm sorry she was not here to welcome you, but you must both come over some other day, and then—"

His mother interrupted him, bringing her fist down on the table with a bang. She said, determinedly,—

"Never! I will never take your wife's hand in friendship, Lovel! I will never break bread with her again, until I know at least that she has repented of her folly and wickedness!"

"Mother!"

"Read that!" said Mrs. Clinton, flinging the paper across to him. "Is it a fit letter for a young married woman to receive?"

Lovel's face blanched as he read it; but though he had never appreciated his wife's talents he did love her, and that tenderly. The blow had been a cruel one, and yet he rallied from it, and defended her loyally, though his heart ached cruelly the while.

"I daresay 'R. G.' is an old friend," he said, with an affected security which did not impose on Jane. "A woman has many such!"

"I hope not!" said his mother, firmly. "The world would come to a pretty pass if married women received such letters as a rule."

"I can trust Maude. She never deceived me in my life."

"Indeed! I suppose then, you know she is constantly in the habit of going to London, and always returns by one particular train?"

"You are dreaming, mother. Maude has been in London only once since we came home, and then I was with her."

"Ask the servant!"

"Reeves would be horrified if I discussed my wife with her."

"Well, she told us—or rather I dragged it out of her, that her mistress had been to London several times in the last month or so."

For the first time Lovel's perfect confidence was shaken. Had he not remarked the change in Maude during the last few weeks? Had he not watched the old sparkle come back to her eye, the colour return to her cheeks? He had flattered himself it meant she had bent her will to his and learned contentment in a dull, domestic life, and now?

His mother was quick to see her advantage, and pursue it.

"Wherever there is concealment there is wrong," she observed, firmly. "With a home

like this, what need has your wife to be running up to London continually?"

"She may have felt lonely," hazarded Lovel. "You know I am away a good many hours!"

"There are plenty of nice people close by who would have been glad to be friendly!"

This was Lovel's own argument, but, somehow, he did not care to listen to it from his own mother.

"There is nothing wrong in going to London," he said, sharply. "It is quite an inexpensive journey, and she spends very little on herself."

"And you are contented that she should indulge in clandestine meetings with 'R. G.'?"

"I daresay it is some old friend."

"So you suggested before! In that case why need she make such secrecy about it? Why, if you looked, I daresay you would find half-a-dozen notes similar to that!"

They were interrupted. A latch key turned sharply in the door. A minute later and Maude herself entered, looking a little tired, certainly, but still with a strange sparkle in her eyes, and a bright, eager smile.

"I am so sorry I was late, Lovel," she said, cheerfully, "but the fog was dreadful, and—"

She stopped abruptly as she became aware of a strange change in her husband's face. It was white and drawn, as though he struggled under some terrible emotion.

Jane Trimble stood in the background, trembling, she knew not why; and on the face of Mrs. Clinton there was a cruel, mocking smile which puzzled Maude, even more than it alarmed her.

"I am sorry I was not here to welcome you," she said, courteously, "but I had made an engagement before I heard you were coming over."

Her hand was outstretched, but Mrs. Clinton did not seem to see it. She looked at the young wife coldly, and said, frigidly,—

"Considering the nature of the engagement I wonder you are not ashamed to mention it. We know everything. Farther deceit on your part is impossible."

Maude Clinton turned to her husband—a slight touch of imperiousness in her tone. She was no patient, long-suffering Griselda, but a proud, warmhearted woman; and that Lovel should stand there calmly while his mother insulted her cut her to the quick.

"Perhaps you will kindly explain what Mrs. Clinton means?" she said, indignantly, "if she knows herself—which I doubt."

"Insolence will not serve you," said the enraged widow, bitterly. "We have the evidence of your folly. Perhaps you will deny that this note was addressed to you?"

Maude Clinton glanced at the little slip of paper which had wrought so much mischief and understood. Again her eyes sought her husband's face; but he stood motionless, almost as though he had been turned to stone. Seeing which Maude, with aching heart, folded the paper, and put it in her pocket.

"May I ask how many more of my private letters you have amused yourself by reading, Mrs. Clinton?"

"You admit, then, it is yours?"

"Certainly!"

"Maude!" broke from Lovel Clinton at last. "For Heaven's sake explain. There must be some terrible mistake. You, my wife, would not surely make clandestine appointments with an old lover in my absence? You could not be so unworthy!"

He spoke too late. If he had only stood by her when she first came in—if he had only defended her against his mother—she would have told him anything, everything; but he had doubted her, and she knew it.

She loved him passionately, but she was proud. She would not admit his right to condemn her unheard, and now she would punish his suspicions at any cost.

"I went to London to meet an old friend," she replied, composedly. "I made the appoint-



ment without consulting you. I have made three others before this and kept them."

"I wonder you are not afraid to confess it," said Mrs. Clinton, severely. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. If I were Lovel you should repent bitterly of your folly."

"I know neither fear nor shame," replied Maude, quietly. "Perhaps I am too wicked to feel either; but, if anyone deserves to be ashamed, I think it is a man who, in his wife's absence, suffers two strange women to overhaul her private letters, and basely slander her to him!"

"Listen to her!" said Mrs. Clinton, angrily; "she is utterly lost to all sense of wifely duty!"

But the wife of the poverty-stricken city clerk thought otherwise. Being only a poor relation perhaps she had no right to an opinion at all; but all her sympathies were Maude's. Forgetting her timidity she left her refuge by the fire, and came up to her sister-in-law's side.

"I never slandered you, my dear, I couldn't; you looked so bright and happy always. I felt you must be good too. My mother upset your work-table by accident. When I came back from asking your servant about the trains, she put that wretched note into my hand. I never guessed it was yours, and I had read it through before I understood. I told mother then it must be from an old friend, and that we ought both to forget we had seen it."

Maude's face softened. She took the thin worn hand in hers, and said, simply,—

"Thank you, Jane!"

Lovel did not approve of this. He was expecting his wife to burst into tears, and appeal to him. Even now he did not share his mother's suspicions. He only thought "R. G." was a scholastic acquaintance.

"I am waiting for your explanation, Maude?"

"I have none to give you!"

"Listen! We cannot go on like this. After what has happened I can never trust you again. I can never have faith in you again until you tell me the true history of your acquaintance with 'R. G.'"

"And if I refuse?"

"You dare not!" put in Mrs. Clinton. "The whole world would condemn you!"

Maude Clinton took no notice of this ill-timed interruption. She turned to her husband, and ignoring alike the presence of her taunting mother-in-law, and poor weeping Jane, she spoke as though they two had been alone.

"If you had asked me differently, Lovel, I would have told you everything. Perhaps it was a mistake not to confide in you from the first, but now you have forfeited every claim. You have suffered me to be insulted in your presence without attempting to defend me! You have believed a cruel slander against me on the flimsiest evidence! Your sister, who has seen me, perhaps, three times in her life, can trust me. You, who swore to honour me till death did us part, have your mind turned against me by the faintest whisper? Heaven may forgive you, Lovel! I never can!"

She turned and left them with a firm, unflinching step. They heard her go upstairs, and presently the key turned in the lock of her bedroom door. Evidently, Mrs. Lovel Clinton did not intend her solitude to be disturbed.

That was an afternoon of storms. Instead of setting down to a comfortable high tea, Lovel had to accompany his mother and Jane to West Ledworth station, and wait there till he could put them into the Brixton train; and as the fog was dense, and the traffic slightly disorganised in consequence, all this took time.

Mrs. Clinton had thrown out a hint or two about the "spare room" at Rosemary Villa, but her son did not take them.

He had seemed to side with his mother against his wife, but he must have had some

consideration for Maude since he shrank from the very idea of quartering his mother on her in the present state of things.

It was late when he returned; but a tempting meal was ready, and Mrs. Reeves, who waited on him with an unusually grave face, suggested that as her mistress was lying down with a bad headache, it would be better not to disturb her.

When the worthy servant had gone to bed, Lovel went upstairs and tried the door of his wife's room.

It was still fastened, and so unwilling to alarm Mrs. Reeves by making any noise at that time of night he turned into his dressing room and threw himself on the sofa there.

There were plenty of rugs and shawls at his disposal, but these did not prevent his getting up the next morning feeling very stiff and cold, and—it must be confessed—with his heart decidedly hardened against Maude.

"There's no time for an explanation now," he decided, as he took his lonely breakfast. "She must be sulking, though I never thought her sullen before."

If Maude had been calm enough to judge things coolly she would have seen that Lovel did trust her after all. The very sign of it was his going off to London without attempting to demand the explanation she had twice refused.

As a fact, poor Lovel Clinton felt utterly dazed. He would have staked his life on his wife's innocence of anything she thought to be wrong; but then Maude, with her higher education and independent girlhood, had a completely different moral standard from that of Lovel's womenkind.

She was not so bigoted or narrow-minded. Her feelings were wider, her sympathy more generous. She would have nursed a beggar girl or a repentant Magdalen had she conceived it her duty; while Lovel's mother and sisters would have gathered up their skirts and passed by in silent disdain.

At eleven o'clock Maude came downstairs, looking very white and tired. In vain Mrs. Reeves pressed breakfast upon her. She said it choked her. The good woman was almost in despair, and carried off the untasted toast in mournful silence.

"Reeves," said Maude, suddenly, "I think you like me!"

"Indeed, I do ma'am!" was the prompt reply. "You see, your father and mother were main good to me. My sister was nurse-maid at the Vicarage when you were a baby, and many's the time I've held you in my arms. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, my dear young lady!"

There were tears in Maude's brown eyes as she pressed the good creature's hand.

"I am sure I can trust you. Reeves, I am going away!"

Reeves started.

"It must be that old oat yesterday who made the trouble!" she said, speaking her thoughts aloud, with terrible frankness. Then, as she recollected, "I'm sorry to speak ill of the master's mother, ma'am, but that's what she is!"

Maude did not contradict the opinion—perhaps she shared it.

"Mrs. Clinton has made my husband think I did something very wrong," said the young wife, slowly, "and I am too proud to defend myself, and so I mean to go away!"

"I wouldn't," said Reeves, feelingly. "Don't you see, ma'am, its just like giving her her wish."

But Maude persevered in her decision. All she would promise Reeves that before long she would send her an address at which to write to her. She left the old servant a delicate task, that of lulling the suspicion and diverting the curiosity of the people in Boxed-road, and other neighbours in West Ledworth.

"No one here ever liked me, Reeves," said the girl, rather plaintively, "but for your master's sake I shouldn't like them to say anything very bad of me."

"I'll take care of that, ma'am. I shall just say there's trouble at the Vicarage, and you've had to leave home all in a minute. It's too true, ma'am, for there will be trouble there when they know what's happened."

### CHAPTER III.

IN a very handsome house at Sarbiton lived Sir Royal Glenval and his sister, Dorothy. That is to say, the fine old mansion belonged to Sir Royal, and he made it his headquarters whenever he was in England; but since the death of his wife and son, some twenty years before, the Baronet had become a confirmed wanderer. Sometimes he did not spend one month out of the twelve at Sarbiton. In his absence his sister ruled there with gentle sway. She was one of those sweet, motherly creatures who are found occasionally among the ranks of spinsterhood, and whose very existence ought to remove all opprobrium from the title of "old maid."

Lunch had been over some time on a certain November afternoon, but Sir Royal and his sister still lingered in the dining room. They occupied two comfortable arm-chairs on either side of the great wood-fire. Miss Dorothy had her knitting. Sir Royal was expatiating on his exploits in London the day before.

"She is prettier than ever, Dolly. I almost regretted I hadn't taken your advice years ago, and adopted her."

"Well," replied his sister cheerfully. "In that case you would have had to give her up now to Mr. Clinton, so our home would have been just as lonely; and if I remember rightly, you gave me very excellent reasons at the time for not adopting her."

"Well, I foresaw Rossiter would have a dozen children, and it didn't seem fair one should be brought up in luxury and the rest in poverty. That's all, Dolly!"

"Well, he has only ten! Did you ask Maude and her husband to come and see us?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I am quite convinced Lovel Clinton is a priggish, disagreeable fellow, who makes that poor child miserable. Oh, I don't mean he starves her or flirts with other people, but Maude is a fine character, and he can't appreciate her!"

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, she didn't," said Sir Royal, warmly. "She praised him, but she didn't look happy; and when I asked if he wouldn't be proud of her book when it came out she said a little sadly, 'Oh, he won't read it! Lovel doesn't think women can write. He says they ought to make puddings and darn stockings!'"

"Poor Maude!" said Miss Dorothy, involuntarily. "And is the book likely to be successful?"

"It's in the publisher's hands, and she's to have three hundred for it. Then they gave her an order to write a serial for one of their magazines. The little girl was delighted."

"And it is all your doing, Royal?"

"No it isn't. Long ago she used to write pretty little sketches, and there was promise in them. When she asked me to introduce her to a publisher I told her to wait till she'd something to show him. She sent me half the story three weeks ago, and brought up the rest yesterday."

"Royal, she can't have written a story in three weeks that would fetch all that money?"

"Oh, dear, no. I fancy it was written before she married. She has only been touching it up and improving it."

"She will feel quite rich!"

"She told me she was afraid she was an expensive wife, as she had been so busy with her books—that she didn't understand much about housekeeping. That's what set me against her husband. There was something almost pathetic in a bride of three months trying to

pay back the bridegroom what she cost him!"

Miss Dorothy shook her head.

"Maudie Clinton always took life so earnestly. Poor little thing! Even at home she was one apart—the only one of the tribe with a love of books and learning."

Sir Royal heaved a sigh.

"Well, we must hope it'll come right by-and-by; but I wish, Dolly, you'd write her a good long letter, and let her see she has got a friend or two left that care for her. I'm off now. I promised to ride over to Wimbleson this afternoon."

He was sixty-eight, a tall, soldierly man, of good old family and large fortune. The latter was strictly entailed on a nephew whom he rarely saw.

Sir Royal would have nothing in his power to bequeath when he died except his savings, and so he had set himself long ago to put aside a provision for his sister.

It was all he did put aside, for no case of charity ever found his purse-strings closed. He was a most generous friend and a benefactor to all his poorer neighbours.

Miss Dorothy sat on alone, a little troubled. She was some years younger than her brother—only fifty-five now, though her lace cap and silver hair seemed to mark her as an old lady. She had had her romance long ago. She had loved her far-off cousin, Phil Rossett. Her father was living then, and had deemed the poor cousin a bad match for his only daughter.

Phil was sent away. He could not have married on ninety pounds a-year, even if Dorothy would have taken him in defiance of her father's wishes. She was twenty-four then, her lover the same age. They parted, hoping for better times.

Dorothy nursed her father through a long illness, and on his death-bed, touched by her devotion, he bade her be happy in her own way.

Alas! for Dorothy's romance. Six years had passed; she was thirty turned. The same paper which announced her father's death contained the marriage of the Rev. Philip Rossett to Myra Green.

The young curate had married his Vicar's daughter, and in due time was appointed to a small country living, which was in Mr. Green's patronage, as Vicar of an important town.

He and Dorothy never met again. Sir Royal, who had been abroad during the love-passages between his sister and Philip, never heard of Dorothy's romance, and could not understand the great interest she took in the Rossetts.

He and his wife—it was not long before her death—were making a driving tour in Hampshire through the New Forest, and remembering Philip's vicarage was near there, they went over one day to see Mr. and Mrs. Rossett.

By some strange chance they arrived when the second little daughter was a month old, and needed both god-parents and a name. Sir Royal and Lady Glenval offered to "stand" for her, and by the Baronet's express wish she was christened Maudie, after his wife.

When Lady Glenval died, not so long after, she remembered the brown-eyed baby, and begged her husband to try and befriend her in after life.

"Between ourselves, Dolly," said the widower, when he discussed the Rossett ménage, and she suggested he should adopt little Maudie, "I wouldn't care to have much to do with Phil's wife. I dare say she was a pretty wax-doll sort of girl when he married her, but now at twenty-two she is nothing but a nurse and housekeeper. They are as poor as church mice. Still she might sometimes try and talk of something besides her babies and her servant."

So the Glenval patronage rested on Maudie. Sir Royal paid her school-bills, and had her to spend the holidays at Sribiton, for even if he was away Dorothy was glad of her company. But for the fact that the whole year

before Maudie's marriage the Glenvals were abroad Lovel would certainly have been invited to Sribiton.

He had heard scant mention of them. The Rossetts, as a family, were rather jealous that none of their body but Maudie had even been noticed by the rich relations.

Philip Rossett could not quite forget that Dorothy Glenval had a right to call him faithful. His wife thought the money spent on Maudie would have been of more use had it passed through her own hands. Then, too, the Vicar was not devoid of pride. He did not like to confess, even to his son-in-law, that his child owed her education to the charity of a distant cousin.

Maudie herself had another reason for silence. She loved Lovel passionately, but even before she was married she learned how petty and narrow were his relations. They would have pardoned everything to anyone possessing a title, and even to Maudie herself they would have forgiven much had they known she was cousin to a wealthy Baronet. The girl hated boasting, and so she held her tongue.

Miss Dorothy sat alone till the short day faded. She was thinking of ringing for the lamps when there came a ring at the bell, and after a short pause the butler opened the door and announced,—

"Mrs. Clinton."

"Maudie, my dear child!" and Dorothy's loving arms were round her in an instant, but Maudie did not respond to the caress. She seemed almost to shrink from that warm embrace, and she said, wearily,—

"You must know all, please aunt, before you are kind to me. I have run away from home, and my husband thinks I am very wicked."

Dorothy Glenval stooped and kissed the poor girl tenderly.

"My dear child, don't you know I love you almost as a daughter? If all the world spoke against you, Maudie, I should not believe them. Royal is just as fond of you as I am, and when he comes home he will know how to comfort you."

"Please"—Maudie's voice almost broke—"please, aunt, may I tell you about it? I couldn't let Sir Royal know what they think."

Miss Dorothy listened to the story readily.

"Darling," she said, simply, when Maudie stopped, "I think your mother-in-law acted cruelly. I can understand you never wishing to speak to her again, but your husband is different. If he knew nothing of your literary hopes, if he did not know that my brother was your godfather, and a man of nearly seventy—he had a right to some explanation."

"He should have had it. I would have told him everything, only he took his mother's part against me. Oh! it was wrong and unmanly to stand there and let her speak to me as though I were—wicked!"

"My poor little girl," said Miss Dorothy, quietly, "you have been hardly dealt by, but—you love your husband; and unless you are to live out your lives apart there must be some explanation. Will you let Royal go to Mr. Clinton and tell him everything?"

"I should die of shame if Sir Royal knew the cruel things they had dared to think. I love my husband dearly, but he is tired of me."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite! He is always finding fault with my opinions and habits. He would like me to spend my days gossiping with the neighbours, and never doing anything sensible."

Miss Dorothy stroked the fair head fondly.

"But you love him, Maudie?" she persisted. "I love him, but I think I almost hate his mother, and I would rather beg my bread than go home and be tyrannised over by her."

"You must stay with us, dear, for the present," decided Dorothy Glenval. "I shall send down to the station for your luggage; and to prove that you are welcome, I will tell you I was on the point of writing to ask you to pay us a visit!"

"Really!"

"Really. Your godfather fancied yesterday you were not looking very bright, and we both thought a change would do you good."

"I think you are the kindest person I ever met. Oh, Aunt Dolly, I do so wish Mrs. Clinton had been like you!"

Miss Glenval sighed.

"I suppose she is devoted to her son, and does not care for a rival in his affections!"

"It isn't that. I believe she wanted him to marry."

"What is it, then?"

Maudie hesitated, and her kind friend helped her out.

"Did she think you too learned, Maudie?"

"Too undomesticated," confessed Maudie. "You see, there are four sisters younger than Lovel, all unmarried; and Mrs. Clinton lost some money in a bank a few years ago, and they have been poor since—no so poor to fear debt, you know, but they have to be careful."

"And none of the girls are earning anything?"

"Oh, dear no! that would be *infra dig*. They are waiting for husbands. Now, if only I had been different, and fond of visiting and talking, I might have had one of them on a long visit, and got up little suppers for Lovel's bachelor friends, and that sort of thing."

"I begin to understand! Mrs. Clinton hoped if her son married his wife would help off his sisters. Is that it?"

"Yes! Fancy trying to find husbands. I call it disgusting; and then to have a strange girl in the house always. It would have been horrid!"

"Dear, are you not unreasonable! Marriage is probably the only profession your sisters-in-law would succeed in. Why not give them a chance of entering on it?"

"Aunt Dorothy, I never thought you a matchmaker!"

"I am not, I hope! Only, child, if you had agreed to have one of the Misses Clinton, say for a month's visit, and made her happy by taking her about, you would have made her and her sisters your friends for life!"

"I don't see how!"

"Because I gather, you and Lovel are better off than his mother and sisters."

"I believe we are!"

"And wherever there is a master of the house, it is easier to be sociable. One month with you would not have found a husband for one of the Misses Clinton; but it would have shown the family you felt kindly towards them, and made the girls careful to try and please you lest you should not give them another invitation."

"It is too late now," said Mrs. Lovel Clinton, sadly. "I have left my husband for ever, and I hope I shall never see his face again!"

After which upbraidings the poor, troubled child sank back in her chair and fainted away, which was not surprising, considering all she had gone through in the last twenty-four hours.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THAT day seemed to Lovel Clinton the longest he had ever spent. Though, unhappily, quarrels had not been rare in his brief married life, he had never before gone to his office without even a sight of his wife.

He thought the clock would never strike the hour that was to set him free; and though, when at last the moment came, and he was fairly on his way to Ludgate Hill Station—he felt an untold relief that he should soon be at home—he yet shrank from the thought of the explanation before him.

He wanted to see Maudie, and assure her that he believed in her fully, and had never doubted her.

He wanted to "make it up and be friends," as children say, and yet he could not forget his mother's slanders. Try as he would to banish all thought of that miserable little note it would haunt him.



He was master of his own house; he had a right to be consulted in all things. His wife had acted very wrongly in meeting anyone without his knowledge, much more a Bohemian who passed under the alias of "R. G."

He told himself all this, and felt aggrieved; but then, on the other hand, Maude was his one love, and he knew perfectly his life would have been a dull affair without her; so that his feelings, as he opened the gate of Rosemary Villa, were more than a little "mixed."

To-day he had not forgotten his latchkey, so he admitted himself without needing to summon Mrs. Reeves.

He went straight to the dining-room. The fire burnt cheerfully, the table was spread for the evening meal; but a pang seized him as he noticed the cloth was only "laid" for one.

"She can't mean to shut herself up in her own room always," he thought, bewildered. "It would be much better to have a good talk, and get it over."

Enter Mrs. Reeves, a little stiffer than usual, but still the perfection of an old trusted servant. Perhaps her heart quaked as much as her master's, for she knew what he had yet to learn.

"Where's your mistress?" demanded Mr. Clinton.

"Isn't her headache better?"

"Mrs. Clinton has gone away, sir!" said Reeves, thinking it better to make a sudden plunge, and jerk out the unhappy truth. "She left a letter for you, and told me if any one inquired I was to say there was trouble at the Vicarage."

Lovel stretched out his hand for the letter almost like a blind man.

Reeves stood waiting; she really was afraid to leave him there alone.

And this is what he read,—

"I never wronged you in thought or deed. I knew I was not an economical wife, and I wanted to earn money for you if I could not help to save it. 'R. G.' had promised to show me how. Ask my father about him if you like. He is an old man not far from seventy, and I think he loved me almost as a grandchild, because I was called after his wife.

"Your mother will be quite happy now, for you are quite free from the 'wicked woman who spoils your life'—you see I remember her exact words. When I saw you stand by and listen to them without one effort to defend me, I think my heart broke. You will never be troubled by me again—you are quite free. Reeves is a good woman, and will know how to silence all curious questions if you trust to her.

"M. C."

Lovel turned on the servant with a white, angry face.

"Is it true? Did you know she meant to leave me?"

Reeves nodded.

"I did, sir. And seeing the poor young lady could do nothing that pleased you I don't think anyone could blame her."

Lovel Clinton stared in speechless surprise.

"She is my wife!" he said, doggedly.

"Her place was here!"

"She was your wife, sir," said Reeves, quickly, "but she wasn't made to be your slave. People think a deal of what a wife owes her husband, but they never seem to look on the other side. A woman gives up a good deal when she marries, and Miss Maude had more to give up than most. She was as happy as a bird when she taught at the High School. Everyone thought her a bright, high-spirited girl. She made friends everywhere, but since she came here not one of those friends has ever been invited to the house, and the folks who do come, never thought of anything but picking holes in her, because she wasn't made to their pattern."

Poor Lovel let himself be lectured without an attempt at remonstrance, he really was too overcome.

"I've seen a good deal of the world, sir," went on Reeves, who saw her advantage and used it, "but I never met a lady who thought less of herself and more of her husband than

did Mrs. Clinton. As to the folks about here—they weren't worthy to tie her shoes. To begin with, the Rossiturs come of a high family. Sir, even if they're poor it's not one of them would come into a lady's house, and ransack her private places while she's away!"

Lovel winced. "He sat down to his tea, but he felt no appetite for it. He was haunted by a strange fear. Where was his wife?"

"As Mrs. Clinton told you so much," he said, bitterly, "I daresay she confided to you something more, namely, the place she was going to?"

"Mrs. Clinton never confided in me, sir. I have eyes, and I couldn't help seeing she was miserable. I've ears, and these walls are thin, so that I couldn't help hearing what your mother said yesterday, and, if I may speak the truth, I'd have dearly loved to show her to the door!"

"I wonder if she's gone to the High School?" said Lovel, meaning his wife, and speaking aloud in his dismay.

"Hardly, sir, considering it's but a mile off, and she wished the West Ledworth folk to think she had gone to her father!"

Lovel tried to eat. Reeves still lingered. At last she got out what was on her mind.

"I've been very comfortable here, sir, and you've behaved kindly to me; but, no offence, I'd rather leave this very night and lose every penny of my wages, than stay here if your mother's to be mistress. I should always be thinking of my poor, dear young lady whom she's driven away."

"Be easy, Reeves," replied the young man, gravely. "There will never be another mistress here until my wife returns."

It was rather an aggravation of Lovel's misery that the very next evening the Rev. Philip Rossitur should appear. He had written to his daughter announcing he was coming to London, and should be glad to sleep at the house. The letter arriving after Maude had left was unopened, and the Vicar's coming was utterly unexpected.

Lovel Clinton was forced to come to a hasty decision—silence or confession, and he chose the latter. He made a clean breast of everything to his father-in-law, and met with, on the whole, kinder treatment than he deserved.

"Maude will come back," said the Vicar, simply. "If ever woman loved her husband she loved you, and when once you tell her you were mistaken, and ask her forgiveness for doubting her, she will return. She has the largest heart, the finest character of all my children; and though your married life has so soon grown shadowed, I am sure all will come right."

"You forget," said Lovel, bitterly. "I have not the slightest clue where she is? How am I to tell her what you say when she has carefully hidden herself from me?"

Mr. Rossitur looked grave.

"If ever I hear from her I will tell you; but, of all places in the world she is least likely to come home to us. My wife is a good woman, but narrow-minded. She has never understood Maude. I cannot be as indignant as I feel at your mother's cruel judgment of my child, since I know my own wife's would have been as harsh."

"Do you think if I sought out this old man, this 'R. G.,' he could tell me anything?"

"I saw him myself to-day," said the Vicar, thoughtfully. "He asked if I had heard from Maude lately, and said when he met her in London on Tuesday he thought she looked ill."

"It was Wednesday she left home."

"Well, he spoke of meeting her on the Tuesday. Maude was always his favourite in our family. She was his godchild, and, besides paying all the expenses of her education, he was always making her presents."

"Then he wasn't poor?"

"Poor!" The Vicar almost laughed, in spite of his anxiety. "My dear fellow, Sir Royal Glenval is one of the richest baronets in England! All his property is entailed, but he has a splendid income while he lives."

"Sir Royal Glenval! Of course I have often heard of him, but I had no idea you knew him."

"As a boy I spent all my holidays at his father's house. My mother was his first cousin, which, I suppose, makes me and Royal kinsmen, though remote ones. He is the only rich relation I possess in the world; but I am not fond of boasting of him, and the subject is a sore one with my wife. She always thinks if he had started one of the boys in life, instead of spending so much on Maude it would have been better."

"Then you are sure Maude is not with him?" asked Lovel. "You don't think she went to his house and claimed his wife's protection?"

"His wife has been dead these twenty years. No, I am certain my daughter is not with him. He distinctly said he had not seen her since Tuesday. I only wish it had been otherwise."

"But what am I to do?"

That question proved hard to answer. Mr. Rossitur went back to the country with it still unsolved.

Lovel advertised in the agency column of the chief London papers. He spent many sovereigns before, on Christmas morning, a few lines reached him, traced in a faint, tremulous hand.

"I have been very ill, but am better now. Please give up looking for me. You know I was always a trouble to you, and you doubted me. So we are best apart."

There was no hiding something of the truth from Mrs. Clinton, senior. After her ill-omened visit to Rosemary Villa she sent three long letters to her son demanding if his wife had "repented," and then finding these unanswered she presented herself at West Ledworth at an hour when she knew he would be at home.

Mrs. Reeves opened the door and ushered her into the dining room, where Lovel sat reading the newspaper. This was before Maude's brief note had reached Rosemary Villa, and he was still in ignorance of his wife's fate.

What he said to his mother was never known; but Mrs. Clinton had no reason to congratulate herself on the interview.

At first, hearing Maude had flown, the widow thought the victory won, and in fancy saw herself and one or two of those unmarried daughters very comfortably domiciled at Rosemary Villa, but she was very soon to be undeceived.

"Of course, we will not forsake you in your trouble, Lovel. I am leaving Jane to-morrow, and I will come at once to take charge of your house. That woman, Reeves, had better go. She was always a far more expensive servant than you could afford!"

"Thank you. I have not the slightest intention of parting with Mrs. Reeves," said Lovel, coldly, "and while she is here no other housekeeper is required!"

"But, my dear boy, think of your loneliness?"

"I would rather be alone, mother, than see you ruling in my wife's home. I shall never forgive myself for suffering you to speak to her as you did. It is your doing, and yours alone, that my life is blighted, and my home desolate!"

"Oh!" No words will convey the volume of meaning the widow put into that "oh!" "Oh! then you approve of private meetings with mysterious strangers?"

"I approve of Maude meeting her godfather, her father's cousin, an old man well-nigh seventy, who all his life had been showering benefits upon her. A man of Sir Royal Glenval's known worth and character would honour any young girl by his kindly notice."

"Sir Royal Glenval—the man who gave twenty thousand pounds to the Westford Infirmary! Why, he is a Baronet!"

Precisely, and Maude's godfather. Mr. Rossitur was with me the other night, and he told me of the warm friendship between

him and Sir Royal. Indeed, they are related. The late Mrs. Rossett was a Miss Glenval."

"But—"

"But you did not know it," said Lovel, bitterly. "You thought I had thrown myself away upon the child of a poverty-stricken parson. Those were your very words. Well, you see, mother, real gentlefolks don't boast of their connections. I don't suppose it ever entered into Mr. Rossett's head that you would appreciate his daughter any more because she was third cousin to a baronet."

Mrs. Clinton, senior, retired decidedly worsted in the conflict. She relieved the long-suffering Jane of her presence, and went home the very next day, and there was great rejoicing among the little Trimble's, to whom "grandmamma" was anything but a welcome guest.

## CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

WHEN people are very poor, and have no hope of even a stray pound of capital to start in any undertaking, they mostly turn their thoughts to letting lodgings. Probably, poor things, if they belong to the class who have known "better days" they yet possess some tidy furniture, and by squeezing themselves into the back of the house, they can contrive to make two front rooms fairly presentable for the desired tenants.

Such a crisis had come in Jane Trimble's life. There was not the smallest chance of her husband's salary increasing, while each year the children's demands, both for food and clothes, grew at the most alarming rate.

If she sent away the little servant, who did so much hard work for the weekly wage of eightpence and her "keep," she would have had to put out the washing. So after many an anxious thought, she told her husband she thought they had better let lodgings.

John Trimble shook his head—a meek, quiet man by nature. A long course of failure and disappointment had made him inclined to look at the black side of everything.

"Who would come to lodge here, Jenny?" he asked, disparagingly.

"Lots of people in this road do let lodgings!" persisted Jane, who could not bear cold water thrown on her cherished plan.

"But they haven't six children," said Mr. Trimble, grimly. "Don't look like that, my dear," as a shadow flitted over his wife's thin face. "The youngsters are, everyone of them, dear to us. But I mean with all the town before them a stranger would hardly care to take lodgings in a house with six children under ten."

"Well, it will cost nothing to try. I wonder how much I ought to ask?"

"Ten shillings a week," suggested John. "Not a penny more. Jenny, my dear, a lodger would be a double benefit, for with the front rooms disposed of we simply couldn't take in your mother when she comes to town. She would see that herself."

Jane Trimble blushed. The pain her mother's visitations were to her no tongue could tell; for Mrs. Clinton expected the best bedroom, the warmest seat at table, and delicacies such as the family never dreamed of for themselves; nor did she offer any compensation, not so much as a pair of socks for the baby or a ribbon for her daughter.

A month at Brixton, whenever she wished to be in London, seemed to her a graceful way of suffering the Trimble's to pay back a small portion of the debt they owed her (according to her views John was responsible for the money she had lost by the failure of his father's bank).

Well, a neat card was bought and placed in the front window. For the first three days Jane Trimble's heart beat with hope whenever a double knock came at the door. When a week passed she was less sanguine, and by the time the card had been up a month she had quite gone over to her husband's view.

But John Trimble was not destined to be right. Before January was over Jane's eldest

born, a bright little maid of nine, came running upstairs with the tidings that a lady was in the parlour, and wanted to know about the rooms.

"A lady!" Mrs. Trimble's thoughts had been on city gentlemen. "I am afraid they won't suit her. What is she like, Mabel?"

"She is not like grandmother," said the little girl, cheerfully, "she speaks so gently. She is nursing little Dot in the big arm-chair."

It was quite true. Jane found her youngest but one in the visitor's lap, stroking her little head against a soft sealskin coat, and saying "Pretty, pretty!"

The mother gave her to Mabel to lead away, and then when she closed the door on them both turned back to greet—her sister-in-law!

"Maudie! Oh, my dear, I am so glad to see you!"

There was a choked sob in Maudie's voice as she answered,—

"Oh, Jane, how is Lovel?"

"I think he is well," said Mrs. Trimble, gravely. "Mamma wanted to go and live with him, but he wouldn't have her. It is given out that Ledworth is too bleak for you, and you are spending the winter with your own family; but oh, my dear! won't you go back to him? His heart must be sore for want of you; and you—you look only the shadow of the pretty bride he brought home so proudly last August."

"I shall never go back to him!"

"But, my dear—"

"Listen, Jane! I went straight to my godfather's, and I was very ill. For weeks I could not move or speak. The doctor said it was brain fever. Then Sir Royal and his sister were going to France till the spring, and they wanted to take me too, only somehow I could not bear to go. I shall never see Lovel's face again; and yet I couldn't bear to feel the sea divided us."

Jane kissed her. It was not a very logical reply, but it soothed poor Maudie as nothing else could have done.

"And what did you do, dear?"

"Oh! I am earning my own living. I write for one of the magazines, and they pay me more than I need, and I have a little store in the bank besides. My godfather wanted to make me an allowance, but it seemed a slight to Lovel, and so I wouldn't have it."

"And where are you living, dear?"

"In lodgings in the Brixton-road; but it is, oh, so lonely; and to day, when I saw the card in your window, Jane, I hoped—"

And the arrangement thus dimly hinted at came about. Neither Mr. Trimble nor his children had ever seen Lovel Clinton's wife, and the visits of the elder Mrs. Clinton and her daughters must perforce cease when Jane had a lodger.

To the hard-working, careworn mother the certainty of a weekly income was an untold boon; but Jane had another motive too.

She saw that Maudie was ill and suffering, lonely and unhappy. She could not bear the thought of her staying in dreary lodgings, where no one knew even her name; but she made one stipulation—she must tell the whole truth to John before Maudie became their inmate.

"He will never consent!"

"I think he will. He has known so much sorrow himself, he always likes people in trouble. I will tell him to-night."

John looked thoughtful, but at last he decided as his wife wished.

"If we were rich I should see no harm in asking her on a visit, so it can't be wrong to take her as a lodger. It would be paying your brother a poor compliment to shut our doors against her just because she is his wife; only, Jenny, I'm afraid you'll find a helpless, fine lady—rather a handful."

This opinion he rescinded in three days.

Maudie Clinton—Mrs. Glen, as she was called by children and servant—proved quite a help to the tired, overworked mother. In

the morning she was always shut up with her writing, but from the one o'clock dinner till bedtime she was at the service of the whole house. The charming dolls' frocks she manufactured out of almost nothing, the little pile of neatly folded garments she used to restore carefully repaired to Mrs. Trimble's big mending basket, were but a trifle in the long list of little kindnesses she was always offering.

"If only Lovel could see her now," said Jane, half tearfully, to her husband one spring evening, "he must forgive her!"

"My dear girl, there was nothing to forgive. That is the hardest part of it. There is no real injury on either side; they did not understand each other, and so they drifted apart. Your mother's interference brought things to a crisis, and they separated. I believe myself if they could only meet all would be well. One can see that poor girl is fretting her heart out for her husband; and when I met Lovel one day last week in the city, I thought he looked ten years older. There is nothing but pride keeps them apart. He cannot come to her because he does not know where she is, and she will not be the one to make the first advance."

Jane looked bewildered.

"I suppose it would not do for me to write to him?" she suggested.

"That would be betraying her confidence! No! Unless some strange chance brings about a meeting I fear this miserable estrangement will last their lives, and they will both go lonely to their graves."

"I don't think Maudie will be alone much longer," said Mrs. Trimble, gravely; "at least I hope not. John, don't you understand?"

Mr. Trimble looked hopelessly puzzled, and his wife went on.

"I think that is why she is so fond of our children. It will be in Jane, John, and I am sure I feel almost distracted. It seems positively wicked not to let Lovel know; and yet, if I sent for him, I am pretty sure Maudie would go away, and hide herself even from us!"

"You mustn't send," said John, decidedly. "Maybe the baby will bring matters right. She'll surely see she can't make her child fatherless to satisfy her pride."

"John, don't be hard on her!"

"I don't mean to be, Jane. There are faults on both sides; because they had no troubles your brother and his wife set out to make them. They're just a foolish young couple, my dear, but maybe things will come right in the end."

They were to come right in a way Jane Trimble little breathed of. When the Jane roses bloomed, making even the tiny back garden at Brixton look bright and summery, Lovel Clinton's child was born.

It was a fine healthy boy, and caused no shadow of anxiety; but before three days had passed the doctors shook their heads over his mother.

A physician had been called in to consult with the ordinary practitioner, and he spoke very plainly to Mrs. Trimble.

"There is something on her mind. She has no strength to rally, just because she has no wish to live. Even now at the eleventh hour you might save her if you could give her peace."

John was out. Poor Mrs. Trimble had no one to consult with, and she was fairly at her wits' end. How could she leave Maudie, perhaps to die in her absence? Yet, how could she let Lovel learn the bad news from a stranger? But Maudie was unconscious, and did not know her, so Mrs. Trimble confided the baby and his mother to the nurse, put on her well-worn bonnet, and set out for West Ledworth.

She got there at seven o'clock. It was a strange contrast to the last time she had stood at that familiar station. The November fog had given place to Jane sunshine, but seemed to Jane there would be no brightness left in the world for her brother when he knew her errand.



She took a cab at the station. It was no time to study petty economies, and was driven quickly to Rosemary Villa. Mrs. Reeves opened the door. Something in Jane's face seemed to tell her the truth.

"My mistress is dead, and you have come to tell us!" said the poor woman.

"Not dead," corrected Jane, gently, "but very, very ill. Where is my brother?"

He came out while they were speaking, took his seat in the cab in utter silence, while Mrs. Reeves quietly turned the key in the door, abandoned Rosemary Villa to its fate and mounted the box beside the driver, first dropping a kind of apology to Mrs. Trimble.

"I'm used to sick folks, ma'am, and can turn my hand to anything."

The journey was in perfect silence, only when they got out at Erixton station Lovel asked, hoarsely,—

"Where did you find her?"

"She has been living with us for the last five months."

"And you never told me?"

"I wanted to, Lovel; but it seemed cruel to drive her from a home where she was loved and cared for."

"But when she was ill?"

"She has only been ill three days," explained Jane. "We always hoped she would send for you when the baby came, but we could not bear to betray her confidence."

"The baby!"

"Your son and heir!" said Jane, trying hard to speak cheerfully. "He only came on Monday!"

She pointed to the door of Maude's room, and he went in alone. Nurse and doctor retreated when they saw him, perceiving it was the husband and father come, and, as they believed, too late. There was no witness present when Lovel met his wife again.

They had thought her sleeping, and feared she would never wake again, but that that strange, deep slumber would pass into the sleep of death.

Love has a wondrous power, though, and as Lovel spoke her name the brown eyes opened slowly, and her voice said faintly,—

"I thought you would come. I felt I couldn't go away without saying good-bye!"

"Not good-bye, my darling," pleaded Lovel. "Oh! if you knew how I have wanted you all these weary months!"

"And I you," she whispered.

"It was all a mistake," said the poor fellow, sadly. "I loved you always, Maude. I never doubted you, only you were so different from any woman I had ever seen, and I could not understand."

"I was wrong too," confessed his wife. "If you were afraid of learned women and blue-stockings I despised all the old-fashioned housewives. I wanted so much to show my way was best—and I failed."

"You must make haste and get well," he told her, fondly, "and then I shall be proud of my wife. I know now, my darling, why you went to London so often, and what was the secret between you and Sir Royal, and how bravely my little wife meant to help me!"

"They said I was extravagant, and I wanted so much to prove I meant to be a good wife. Oh! Lovel, if only the time could come over again!"

"It will!" said Lovel, hopefully. "We will begin afresh, Maude, and you will see things will all be changed."

She shook her head.

"It's too late now. I'm dying, and you've only come to say good-bye. But, Lovel, I'd like to stay with you."

Dying!

Well, they all thought so. The doctor left the house in the belief no more skill of his could avail the poor young wife. The nurse and Mrs. Reeves, as they watched over the unconscious baby, believed by morning he would be motherless.

Only Jane Trimble, with her simple faith,

argued Heaven could not take Maude when her happiness had but just begun.

Lovel and his sister watched by the invalid all that night, and in the morning Jane's hopes were fulfilled. The doctor admitted there was a "slight improvement. After all, his patient might pull through."

This second verdict proved the right one; for now at the time of writing Lovel the second is a handsome boy of four years' old, and his mother is the picture of health and happiness, the joy of her husband's life, and the sunshine of his home.

But that home is no longer Rosemary Villa. Lovel had taken the little house only for a year, and when his wife began to recover he could read in her eyes a great dread of returning to the place where she had suffered so much.

So without saying a word to her he decided to inform his landlord he should not renew the tenancy; and while Maude and the wonderful baby were delighting Miss Dorothy's heart by a long visit at Sarbiton, Lovel found a bijou villa at Wimbledon, and with Mrs. Reeves' able co-operation removed his household goods there.

Sir Royal, who loved his godchild tenderly, considered her debts his, in proof of which, very soon after the Clintons settled at Wimbledon, he found a situation for John Trimble far superior to anything the poor fellow had ever hoped for of late years; and Jane, who had a warm affection for her sister-in-law and the baby born in her house, took advantage of her new prosperity to move to Wimbledon and settle near her brother.

For some years there was a decided coolness between Lovel Clinton and his mother; but when Maude's second child was born, and proved to be a little girl, happy in her husband's love, certain that he was well contented with her, the young wife held out the olive branch, and Mrs. Clinton, senior, was invited to the christening of her son's first daughter.

And so the clouds rolled away. Lovel learned that women's intellect may add substantially to their husband's income.

In time the Clintons as a family grew rather proud of Maude's talents, and liked to talk of her books, and the handsome sum they brought in.

But through all those years Maude has never once revisited West Ledworth. She cannot bear to think of the misery she suffered there when she and Lovel were only A FOOLISH YOUNG COUPLE!

[THE END.]

BESIDES the railroad, which will presently take tourists from the sea to Jerusalem, another route is being surveyed from the coast to Damascus. Just now the engineers are at work in the mountains north of the sea of Galilee. In three or four months rail laying will begin at the historic city of Acre. It is the purpose of the company to run a steamer on the Sea of Galilee, for which they have obtained a concession. Thus modern innovations are rapidly invading the Holy Land.

A CURIOUS, but sensible manner of utilizing the Army in times of peace is reported from the adjoining principality of Montenegro. It may not be generally known that that little country is one of the most fertile spots on earth, and yet produces very little, because the native peasants, who one and all belong to the nobility and fully insist upon their privileges, consider it beneath their dignity to perform menial work, where as every soldier is—a hero! Prince Danilo is, however, of opinion that it does not suffice to be a hero, and therefore ordered each man to plant 200 vines, each general to plant twenty olive trees, whereas a colonel is charged with ten, a lieutenant with five, and a corporal with two olive trees. Thus this ingenious monarch calculates to enrich his country by next spring to the extent of 4,000,000 vines and 20,000 olive trees.

THE most expensive drug is physostigmine, two ounces of which would cost nearly two million dollars. It is a preparation from the calabar bean, and is of use in eye diseases.

THE Italians used fans early in the seventeenth century. It was during the eighteenth century that the lavish ornamentation of fans reached its height, one often representing a small fortune in the matter of jewels, carving, and painting.

THE Russian Church does not favour third marriages. It has just issued a decree imposing a religious penance of from three to five years in length upon all widows and widowers who attempt matrimony for the third time; and for all widows who marry after the age of sixty, a rigid penance of two years' duration is prescribed.

THE name collie takes its rise not from any peculiarity of breed in the dog—for the "collie" and the sheep dog are one—but from the kind of sheep which he once drove. In Scotland there is or was a class of sheep with black faces and legs called "collie," from the Anglo Saxon col, "black." The dogs which looked after these sheep were called collie dogs, which in time became shortened to "collies," and hence the name which the sheep dogs now bear.

THE body of every spider contains four little masses, pierced with a multitude of holes (imperceptible to the naked eye), each hole permitting the passage of a single thread; all the threads, to the amount of one thousand to each mass, join together when they come out, and make the single thread with which the spider spins its web, so that what we call a spider's thread consists of more than four thousand threads united.

THE largest house in the world is the "Freihaus" (freehouse) in Wieden, a suburb of Vienna. In this domicile there are 1,400 rooms, divided into 400 suites of from four to six rooms each, and they at present shelter 2,112 persons, who pay an annual rental of over 100,000 florins (£33,400). Many of the occupants work at their trades in the house, and almost every branch of industry is represented, from the humble cobbler to the haughty merchant. Thirteen courtyards—five open and eight covered—and a large garden, are within its walls.

SOME German scientists, interested in forestry, have recently furnished information in regard to the ages of trees. They assign to the pine tree 500 and 700 years as the maximum, 475 years to the silver fir, 275 years to the larch, 245 years to the red beech, 210 to the aspen, 200 to the birch, 170 to the ash, 145 to the alder, and 130 to the elm. The heart of the oak begins to rot at about the age of 300 years. The holly oak alone escapes this law, it is said; and there is in existence near Aschaffenburg, in Germany, a tree of this kind which has attained an age of 410 years.

A FLY invariably walks towards the top of a window? Taking a hint from this, an inventor determined to use this habit against them. Forthwith he made a window screen divided in half. The upper half lapped over the lower, with an inch of space between. As soon as a fly would light on the screen he invariably proceeded to travel upward, and thus walk straight out-of-doors. On reaching the top of the lower half he would be outside. Not being able to walk down he had no way to return to the room. By this means a room can be quickly cleared of flies, which always seek the light.

AN experimental train, constructed on the American system, has just been built at S windon for the Great Western Railway, and the directors of that company propose to run it for a short time on their main line, and if it is found popular, the new "cars" will be attached to the principal through trains. The carriages are first and third class, with lavatories at either end, and a wide corridor runs the whole length of the train, with sliding doors opening to the compartments, the third-class seating four passengers on each side, and the first class three passengers.

## FACTTLE.

When a person gets into hot water you may be sure that he has furnished his share of the fuel to heat the same.

It should be the aim of every man to leave enough money with which to set up his wife's second husband in business.

"We have sent our pastor his resignation," remarked a prominent officer of a church recently. Quite a neat and suggestive way of putting it.

"What a pretty girl Jimson's typewriter must be," mused Waite. "I never saw such an outrageous lot of misspelled words in a business letter before in all my days."

SERGEANT, instructing the soldiers: "A good dodge in a battle, boys, is this: When you find you have no more cartridges don't let the enemy notice it, but keep firing away."

LADY of the House (indignantly): "No, I don't want anything. This is the twentieth time I've had to answer this bell this morning." Peddler (with injured air): "This is the first time I've rung it, mum."

A SOLICITOUS DAUGHTER.—Old Gentleman (at head of stairs): "Sally, ain't it time to go to bed?" Sally: "Yes, father, dear, don't put it off another minute; your health, you know, is not robust."

"How does it happen that Dr. Worldly performs the marriage ceremony for so many old maids?" "Oh, he always asks them in an audible tone if they are of age, and they all like him."

THE FORCE OF HEREDIT.—Judge: "You confess to having stolen the money, do you? Well, have you any exonerating circumstances to offer?" Culprit: "Yes, your honour, my grandfather was an alderman."

MAMMA: "Take your fork, Tommie. Don't you know it is wrong to eat with your fingers?" Tommie: "Fingers were made before forks, mamma." "I know it, Tommie; but yours were not."

"Yea look bad, Jim. Been campin' out?" "Sorter. To day's the first time I've been out-of-doors in three months." "What was the matter with yer?" "Nothin'; but the judge wouldn't believe it."

SAID the flaxen-haired maiden to the dapper young man behind the counter, "Have you any nice, soft maulin that will suit my complexion and hair?" Shopman: "Bleached or unbleached?"

"Where is that brandy I had to put in the mince pie?" inquired Mrs. Botsman, anxiously. "You ain't seen it, hev ye, Eary?" "S all right, m' dear," replied Eary, "brandy 'zh in me. I'll wait f' my pie."

A HYGIENIC journal says "mothers cannot be too careful about the soap they use on their little ones." Some of the young ones seen in the streets look very much as if their mothers were too careful, however, as regards quantity.

TOM: "You don't go to see your friend Jackson as often as you used to. Is there any coolness between you and him?" Fred: "Oh, no! only we smoked the last of that box of good cigars he had."

Two friends are conversing: "Take my advice and get married." "I have a horror of perpetual slavery." "Ah, my dear boy, if you only could find a wife like mine—so good, so kind, so affectionate, so devoted!" "Well, then, I'll wait till she's a widow."

It may be remarked casually that the eight-hour heaven that is about to open to a portion of the world's toilers will not include newspaper men, or the women who do their own housework. These two classes will continue to work nineteen hours a day.

AT THE PANTOMIME.—Little Emma: "What is the man striking the lady for?" Her Mamma: "He is not striking her; he is only beating time for the musicians." Little Emily: "Well, then, what makes the lady squeal like that?"

JENKS: "Shall we go to the opera this season as usual, Miss Helen?" Helen: "We don't know yet. Ethel and I want to go very much, but our brother George is on his college football team, and we can't tell yet whether we shall be in mourning this year or not?"

"On what did Mr. Hicks preach this morning?" "On the pulpit." "I mean about what?" "About thirty minutes." "You never understand. I want to know what was the subject of his discourse?" "I don't know. He didn't say."

FATHER: "Have you succeeded in finding the owner of that knife you found, Johnny?" Johnny: "No, sir, but I think I know who lost it." "Who do you think?" "Tommy Green." "Why don't you ask him if he did?" "Cause I'm afraid he'll say yes."

A POLITICAL orator, speaking of a certain general whom he professed to admire, said that on the field of battle he was always found where the bullets were thickest. "Where was that?" asked one of the auditors. "In the ammunition waggon," said another.

SLIGHTLY MIND: "Mrs. Jaggs (reading from a paper): 'Among the guests was the grandmother of the bride, who is in her ninety-seventh year.' Jaggs: 'A bride in her ninety-seventh year! Great Scott! How old is the grandmother?'"

"HARRIS is the most agreeable man I know." "In what way does he show it?" "Why, when he'd upset a pint of champagne on my trousers he was just as cheerful about it as he could be. Said he was glad the wine was dry."

HE: "Why should you refuse him on account of his not being your equal? Your grandfather signed the Declaration of Independence. Don't you believe that all men are born?" She: "Oh, yes, of course I do; but some men deteriorate after birth, you know."

QUIDNENS: "Are you in mourning, Scribbler? I notice you always wear black now, when you used always to wear light colours." Scribbler: "Oh, no, I'm not in mourning, but I bought me one of these fountain pens a little while ago, and I find it cheaper to wear black."

FATHER: "Now listen to me, children; I want you from now on to be just as bad as you know how." Tommy: "Won't you whip us, pa?" Father: "Not if you are very bad, but I'll whip you if you behave yourselves. Your aunt is coming to visit us, and I don't want her to stay long."

LANDLORD: "I want to notify you that I want the room you occupy." Single Lodger: "Why, what's the matter?" "In the first place, you have not paid your rent; and secondly, you kiss my wife every time my back is turned. That's going to stop on the first of next month."

"Poor Jenny! It must be an awful shock to you," sympathised her friend. "And to think that you trusted your husband all these years while he was embezzling such enormous sums!" "Yes," she sobbed, "I knew my millinery alone came to more than his salary, but I never suspected him of such an act."

A PROMINENT clergyman gives this description of the life of a minister: "My experiences with churches make me think that ministers are like cats. When you go to a new place first everybody says: 'Come pussy! come pussy! nice pussy,' and you come. Then they begin to rub your fur and say: 'Poor pussy! poor pussy!' and then they say, 'Scat!'"

ANTIQUARIAN: "The custom of throwing the slipper after a bride comes down from very ancient times. Long before the Christian era, a defeated chief would take off his shoes and hand them to the victor, to show that the loser of the shoes yielded up all authority over his subjects. Therefore when the family of a bride throw slippers after her they mean that they renounce all authority over her. Do you understand?" Small Auditor: "Yes, sir. They throw away the slippers they used to spank her with!"

ONE wouldn't object to hold the mirror up to Nature if it was a good-looking lass.

WHY are ships always called "she?" Because the rigging costs more than the hull.

"Yea a broth of a boy," said Maggie. And Pat replied, as he slyly put his arm around her waist, "O'd be better broth if I had a little mate."

A MINISTER finding his congregation going to sleep one Sunday before he had fairly commenced suddenly stopped, and exclaimed: "Brethren, this isn't fair; it isn't giving a man half a chance. Wait till I get along, and then, if it aint worth listening to, go to sleep. But don't before I begin—give a man a chance."

"SPEAKING of names, Miss Van Oosterlinckberry," observed the young man, fingering his hat nervously, "I should think you would get tired, sometimes, of having to spell and pronounce your own name for strangers who are introduced to you. It is so long, you know." "Oh, no," said the young woman, "I don't mind it. I like the name better than any other I know of." And Mr. Short coughed vaguely and changed the subject.

MRS. SHARPTONGUE: "D'ye mean t' say you've been married ten years, an' never had a quarrel with y'r husband?" Fair Stranger: "That is true, madam." "And ye always let him have the last word?" "Yes, madam; I wouldn't for the world do anything to lessen my husband's love for me. He might get careless." "Careless?" "Yen. We are jugglers by profession, and at two performances every day I stand against a board while he throws the knives."

To borrow—that is Nature's greatest constitutional law. The river borrows from the little brooks, and the sea borrows from the rivers. The clouds borrow from the sea, and the earth borrows from the clouds. The moon borrows its light from the sun, and the earth borrows its nightly light from the moon. The first man was borrowed from the earth, and the first woman was borrowed from the man's ribs. And a politician will borrow from any body or anything that will lend.

In the midst of a crowd slowly making their way into a theatre a corpulent gentleman, who was closely following a pretty girl, amused himself by certain tender squeezes and amatory whispers, which at length so annoyed the fair one that, turning her head as far as she could, she exclaimed, with great sharpness of tone: "I wish you would leave me alone, sir." "Very well, my dear," said her plump admirer, "but pray don't eat me." "You are in no danger," replied the nymph; "I am a Jewess."

The advantages of a University education must be judged by results. This is an extract from the letter of a fair gownswoman of seventeen to her father, describing a bucolic incident: "He hurled the previous end of his anatomy against the boy's afterward, with an earnestness and velocity which, backed by the ponderosity of the goat's avoirdupois, imparted a momentum that was not relaxed until he landed on terra firma beyond the pale of the goat's jurisdiction." And her papa says that the refined lucidity of a single paragraph like this stamps his daughter a learned lady, and repays him for all the expense.

THE Chicago Tribune tells of two old friends who met accidentally for the first time in ten or fifteen years. "Well," he said, "you are still Lucy Benderby, are you?" "Yes," she replied, "still Lucy Benderby." "It isn't your fault, I know," he rejoined, meaning to say something complimentary. "That is," he added, nervously, feeling that he had not expressed himself exactly in the way he had intended, "I mean that you're not to blame, you know. You couldn't help it—or—that is, it was the fault of the young men. They, you know," he went on, breaking out in a profuse perspiration, "couldn't be expected—h'm! ha!—to—er—well, I must be going. Ever so glad to have met you."



## SOCIETY.

AMERICAN women spend sixty-two million dollars a year for cosmetics.

It appears that face masks, for wear during sleep, are sold to benefit complexions.

The Duke of Somerset, who died recently, was eighty. He never married, and only succeeded his brother six years ago. He is now succeeded by his only surviving brother, who is seventy-eight. He has four sons, two of whom are twins.

The trainer who has charge of the Prince of Wales's horses is said to have only one wish in life, and that is that, just for once, he may succeed in training a horse for the Prince that will win the Derby. Then he could die happy, he says.

We have reached the first stage of the "lying back" arrangement of our skirts. The revival of what we once heard a distinguished writer call the "calskin" style of gown has been for some time threatened.

MISS FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE is staying in London. Her venerable brother-in-law, Sir Harry Verney, who is in his ninetieth year, is also making a short visit to the metropolis.

The Dean and Chapter of Durham have just arranged to light their magnificent cathedral by electricity. The effect will be very fine, and the electric light will actually cost less than the inadequate system of illumination which is at present in use there. The river Wear is to supply the motive-power.

The Bishop of Exeter has begun to set an example to his brother prelates, which, it is much to be hoped, they will follow. His Lordship and chaplain "prosper" about the diocese in search of overworked clergy, and when they find one, straightway send him away for rest and change and undertake his Sunday duties in his absence.

An American paper gives to the world the views of various "enlightened personages" about dress, who denounce high far collars as unwholesome; they make the women of the present day susceptible to throat affections, and they—be warned, dear ladies, against so awful a penalty—tend to make the neck "sawny."

The "very latest" in afternoon gatherings in New York, now, is a "portrait tea." A lady has her portrait painted by some artist of note, and set up on an easel in the best light of her drawing-room, and appropriately near the chair where sits the original; then all her particular friends are invited to come and compare and criticize—i.e., pay compliments.

For soon becomes very dirty in foggy, messy weather, and it cannot be brushed like cloth, nor is shaking much good. A fine white towel or handkerchief is best for treating a very good jacket or bon, and it is surprising how much real softness can be wiped off.

The German Emperor is evidently anxious to guard against all possible eventualities. He has arranged that his only brother, Prince Henry, shall divide his time equally between sailing and statesmanship, and pass exactly half the year in Berlin. He is at first to be attached to the Home Office, and will afterwards be initiated by the Emperor (who curiously enough, constantly talks of the uncertainty of human life in general and his own in particular) into the duties of his position during a minority.

The ladies of Chihuahua and Zacatecas have a habit of wearing fireflies for jewellery. The legs of the flies are shaped like hooks, and they appear to have been formed expressly in the interest of the ladies. These living diamonds sparkle and shine more than any of the diamonds of Africa or South America, for the fireflies in that part of the world have a rare brilliancy never witnessed in the North.

## STATISTICS.

THERE are 100 per cent. more criminals among unmarried than married men.

THE annual consumption of oysters in Britain is 1,600,000,000.

FROM the United Kingdom nearly one million pounds' worth of medicines are exported yearly.

IN New South Wales one-third of the population, and in Queensland one-fourth of the population, is Irish.

POSTAL savings banks were established in 1861. The telegraphic service was transferred to the State in 1870. Postcards were introduced in the same year. In 1871 the postal unit of charge was made 1d. for one ounce. In 1881 postal orders were issued, and in 1883 the parcel post was established. Sixpenny telegrams were introduced in 1885.

## GEMS.

If there is really no such thing as unselfishness, as has been said, it is a very sweet kind of selfishness that prefers the pleasure of another before its own.

To live in the presence of great truths and eternal laws, to be led by permanent ideals—that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him, and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him.

The graves of the best of men, of the noblest martyrs, are, like the graves of the Moravian Brethren, level and indistinguishable from the universal earth; and if the heart could give up its secrets our whole globe would be a Westminster Abbey laid low.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

To prevent pie juice from running out in the oven, make a little opening in the upper crust and insert a little roll of stiff paper perpendicularly. The steam will escape from it as from a chimney, and all the juice will be retained in the pie.

**LITTLE WHITE CAKES.**—Dry half a pound of flour, rub into it a very little pounded sugar, one ounce of butter, one egg, a few caraways, and as much milk and water as to make a paste. Roll it thin, and cut it with a top of a canister or glass. Bake fifteen minutes in tin plates.

**LITTLE SHORT CAKES.**—Rub into a pound of dry flour four ounces of butter, four ounces of white powdered sugar, one egg and a spoonful or two of thin cream, to make it into a paste. When mixed, put currants into one half, and caraways into the rest. Cut them as before, and bake on tins.

**RICE PUDDING WITHOUT EGGS.**—Wash one large cup of rice in two quarts of water, and then put it into one quart of milk; add a cup of sugar, a teaspoonful of salt and half a nutmeg; put it into a deep dish and bake it in a moderate oven two hours: serve with cream and sugar.

**GINGER BEER.**—To two gallons water add two ounces bruised ginger and two pounds of sugar. Boil half an hour, skim, and pour into a jar or tub with sliced lemon and half-ounce cream of tartar. When nearly cold add a cupful of yeast. Let it work for two days. Then strain, bottle, and cork. A preference is given to stone bottles.

**STEWED RABBIT.**—Wash and dry the rabbit and cut it up into small joints. Put one dessert spoonful of butter in a stewpan; make it quite hot and brown, and then fry the rabbit. Chop an onion and add it, also a little chopped parsley, and if you can, a tomato, cut up in little bits. Mix one dessert spoonful of flour, pepper, and salt to taste in 1½ breakfast cups of water; stir it in, and when it boils up put on the lid and let it stew slowly one hour.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Sutlej, a large river in British India, with a descent of twelve thousand feet in one hundred and eighty miles, is the fastest flowing river in the world.

THE traveller, Dr. Orbnry, says that in many years he spent in South America he never saw a bald Indian, and scarcely ever a grey-headed one. The negroes turn grey more slowly than the whites.

SOMNOL is the name of a new hypnotic recently discovered by a Berlin physician. Its effects are far less depressing than those of chloral, and in other characteristics it has the same advantages.

DR. PINCUS, of Berlin, claims to be able to detect in the hair, by the aid of a polariscope, certain traces of past emotions. He explains that violent mental troubles cause the hair to become decolourised just beneath the skin.

THE treasury directs that in future an attendance book is to be kept in every Government office. Civil servants on being promoted are to serve seven hours daily, and except in special instances, all clerks will retire on attaining the age of sixty years.

A NEW composition is made from finely crushed granite, and which when formed into shapes by moulding, and afterwards burned and hardened, is to all appearances as hard and strong and durable as the solid stone itself, which it also closely resembles.

PROFESSOR HOLDEN, of Lick Observatory, reports that in pictures of the moon lately taken there are plainly visible parallel walls, the tops of which are only about two hundred yards wide, and not more than twelve hundred yards apart. He offers no conjecture of their meaning.

THE whale is no more a fish than the bat is a bird. Its young are born like the kitten and the puppies, but only one at a time. The young whale takes its nourishment at its mother's breast, just as the human baby does, and it is just as carefully watched and guarded by its parents.

LONDON clergymen, who are too lazy to write their sermons, or who lack the ability to produce good ones, will be helped out of their trouble by a local bookseller, who advertises that he has in hand four thousand second-hand sermons, which he will be pleased to sell for 5 dols. each. "The strictest secrecy observed," the advertiser adds.

An electric machine used in an hotel kitchen for washing dishes consists of two tanks about twenty inches deep. The first one is filled with boiling water. On the sides are two propellers, exactly in shape like those of a steamship. Above is a disc and lever, such as was used in Kemler's electrocution. The dishes are put on edge in wicker crates very much like lobster pots. The attendant throws the lever across the disc, the circuit is completed, and the propellers with great rapidity revolve, throwing the powerful currents from opposite directions. Soap and lye are put into the tanks and the water fairly seethes. The boiling water tank is used for rinsing, and the dishes come out bright and clean.

"ORANGES and lemons, says the bells of St. Clement's," according to a quaint and ancient doggerel which thousands of school-children have chanted while they play, without knowing that the words had any import other than the hazy ideas conveyed to young minds by nonsense rhymes. Beadles and porters of St. Clement's Inn, however, attach a practical meaning to this music of the bells. It is their custom always on New Year's morning, and has been from time immemorial, to present to each tenant of chambers in the Inn an orange and a lemon, accompanying this gift with wishes for "A Happy New Year." If all ancient customs were so honoured in the observance, there would be little fault to find with them.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**RECRUIT.**—A military pace is two and a half feet.  
**TED.**—The last general election was in July, 1886.  
**AMITA.**—Declined with thanks.  
**FARMER.**—The dog-tax was 12s. in 1886.  
**J. B.**—The china wedding comes on the twentieth anniversary.  
**BARTLEY.**—Wood engravings are printed with wooden blocks, and plate engravings with metal plates.  
**PHINA.**—We advise you to consult a lawyer in regard to the several questions addressed to this department.  
**J. SMITH.**—The Mint does not coin silver for private persons.  
**PAUL.**—Next to the United States, Australia is stated to give the most gold.  
**MURIEL.**—There are no words or names in the Bible of more than six syllables.  
**LIORIEL.**—Unless your income from all sources amounts to £150 you are not liable to pay income tax.  
**VIORIEL.**—The deceased's eldest son would inherit the property.  
**K. G.**—The name of the Great Ormes Head is derived from the Norse *Orms*, a serpent.  
**JAPAN BLACK.**—It is a trade matter entirely. You must ask someone in the business to help you.  
**THE CAPTAIN.**—The estimated population of Montreal is 202,000, and of Toronto 172,463.  
**EMME.**—There is no registry for private marriages. They must take place either in a place of worship or at the office of the superintendent registrar of the district.  
**PASTERED.**—Ratcatchers usually employ ferrets to drive the rats out of their holes, and they bag them as soon as they emerge, or let the ferret snap them up.  
**V. TRALE.**—The Education Acts are published in forms, and you can obtain them through any bookseller.  
**BAION.**—One gallon of pure water at 62 deg. Fahr. weighs 10 lbs., and is in bulk equal to 277 2/3 cubic inches.  
**WORRIED.**—The husband is answerable for the debts contracted by his wife before marriage, only so far as he may have benefited by property so acquired.  
**MIRA.**—If the business is conducted by the wife with her own money, and for her own profit, her husband's creditors will have no claim upon it.  
**PERDITA.**—Curling would not affect the general colour. You need not trouble yourself about grey hairs at your age, nor for some time to come.  
**CRISSE.**—In some graves purposely constructed it is always so, and would always do where the draught is downwards. As to an ordinary grave, try for yourself.  
**J. BUDDEN.**—Write to one of the papers connected with the service. We have no accurate information on the subject.  
**MABEL.**—The marriage would be perfectly legal in England, but in France a man under twenty-five years of age must have the consent of his parents to his marriage.  
**TOMBOY.**—The amount of gunpowder used in firing the 111-ton gun, the largest in the British service, is 960 pounds, or just over 80 stones—fully 11 hundred-weight.  
**ARGUMENT.**—The trial of the Tichborne claimant commenced 11th May, 1871. He was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment, with hard labour, on 28th February, 1874; and released on ticket-of-leave 30th October, 1884.  
**ELIPHEAL.**—The Tay Bridge is 10,730 feet long, the Forth Bridge, 8,076 feet. First opened in June, 1870; the second on 24th January, 1890, when first train containing directors crossed.  
**RESTLESS.**—We think you will find Philadelphia the more convenient port, but it really makes little difference which of them you select, as the railway route to Illinois is about as direct from one place as the other.  
**TYPHOON.**—The slight excess of males born into the world is speedily adjusted by the larger mortality from war and accident among males. The sexes keep remarkably even all the world over.  
**SIR HUMPHREY.**—Like the planets, the sun is all the time spinning like a top. It turns round once in about twenty-five days and eight hours, moving always from east to west.  
**OLD BAR.**—You can execute a deed of gift in favour of your daughter, but the property will then become absolutely her own, and you will no longer possess any control over it.  
**AXAX.**—There was no compulsory registration of births in 1825. The only plan will be to inquire of the clergyman of the church at which the child would probably have been baptised.  
**DOUBTER.**—Supplies of Dr. Koch's lymph have been received at many of the Birmingham hospitals. We cannot give the names of private patients who are using it.  
**A. M.**—In point of population, Bombay is the second city in the British Empire. The estimated population of Bombay is 775,190, of Liverpool 613,463, and of Glasgow 690,268.

**GERALDISE.**—The ex-Empress Eugenie, widow of the late Emperor, Napoleon III., was a daughter of Count Cyprien de Montijo, a Spanish grandee. Her only son, Prince Louis Napoleon, was killed in Zululand in 1879.  
**BEATRICE.**—To prevent that shine to the skin with which so many are annoyed, especially in warm weather, use a little camphor in the water, when bathing the face.  
**MS. BURT.**—He had better write to the clergyman of the parish for a copy of the burial entry. The will can be seen at the district registry at which it was proved. The cost of a copy will depend upon its length.  
**D. D.**—The only dogs exempt from taxation are—1 Those under six months of age; 2 Those employed on a farm solely for the purpose of tending cattle; and 3 Those employed for the guidance of blind people.  
**JACK (Manchester).**—The writing is very careless, but by no means a bad hand. It is rather masculine in character, but ladies affect all things masculine nowadays. With care and practice it will make a good business hand.  
**TRADER.** 1. He may use an unregistered trade-mark if he pleases; but other people may, of course, use it also. 2 A trade-mark may be registered at the Patent Office, 25, Southampton-buildings, W.C., and the cost is 5s.  
**MARY.**—To make mulled cider, take one quart of cider and four eggs. Beat the eggs to a froth, and stir them rapidly into the boiling cider. Add a few grains of allspice and half-a-dozen cloves. Sweeten to taste.  
**FANCY'S FERRY.**  
 You've crossed his ferry many a time. Perhaps you did not know it.  
 He seats you in his ferryboat, and then begins to row it;  
 He dips his oars so softly that you cannot even hear them,  
 And lo! you land at Fancy's docks before you know you're near them.  
 Oh, Fancy's land looks very grand, with structures high and airy,  
 And bright impossibilities to mislead the unwary;  
 And presently you find yourself, no matter what your station,  
 A-building castles in the air that haven't a foundation.  
 And yet it isn't difficult to rear them till they're higher  
 Than anything you ever saw in turret or in spire;  
 And Fancy seems so wondrous kind, he gratifies each notion—  
 You've not a whim but is indulged through his extreme devotion.  
 Old humdrum town you left behind seems sadly uninviting,  
 With schools and books and lessons that you're tired of reciting;  
 But lo! what's this! Your castle shakes! Its walls are all a-rumble!  
 You stand amid a ruined mass alive, but very humble.  
 Then Fancy rows you home again—it doesn't take a minute;  
 You wouldn't know—his boat's so swift—that you were really in it.  
 But at a word (with such a shock!) false Fancy lands his wherry;  
 What does he care for foolish folk who daily cross his ferry?  
**ANXIOUS.**—The outbreak of war with the United States would not affect an English shareholder's rights in an American railway, though it might interfere with the regular payment of his dividend during the actual hostilities.  
**TRAUROLED.**—Common horseradish grated into a cup of sour milk, then strained, is said to be an excellent lotion for removing freckles. An ounce of lemon juice in a pint of rose water, will also answer the same purpose. Both are harmless and good.  
**FORB.**—The Mayor is recognised as the local king. In a sense he takes precedence of all others at any public gathering; but there may be many in the locality who, from their wealth or talent, are more truly "leading" men than he.  
**GARBOL.**—Precisely the same as in the Savings Bank; but except you are going to deal with a sum in excess of £50 yearly you should remain in the Savings Bank. Interest is the same all year round there, and security undoubted.  
**G.**—There is not really a pennyworth of difference between the line Go to New York, and take ticket right through. You will not be charged on clothes that have been worn, so give your things all a day or two's airing on your person.  
**TREAPASE.**—Neither a gamekeeper nor anyone else has a right—whether with notice or not—to shoot dogs found trespassing. The owner of such dogs is liable for any damage they may do; and he has a remedy, by action for their value, against whoever may shoot them.  
**CONSTANT READER.**—A bird's eye view, in the fine arts, is a term used to denote a view arranged according to the laws of perspective, in which the point of sight or situation of the eye is placed at a certain height above the objects viewed and delineated. It is a useful method of representing battles, as also of giving a general notion of a small district of country.

**NASNE.**—Unless they are specially mentioned in the will step-children have no claim at all.

**F. SHARPE.**—William II, German Emperor and King of Prussia, was born on January 27, 1859. The reigning family is descended from Frederick of Hohenzollern, a German count, in 980, and Frederick William, the Elector of Brandenburg, 1640-88, whose son became King of Prussia.

**INTERESTED.**—Carrick Castle, on Loch Goll, dates from 15th century, but is thought to occupy the site of a very much more ancient Scandinavian fort. It was a royal stronghold, held by the Earls of Argyll. It was on one occasion burned by the men of Atholl. "Lord Ullin's Daughter" is a supposititious incident.

**LINCOLN LAD.**—The origin of the name of Boston is perfectly well known. At some exceedingly remote period of time, there lived, near the site of the old English town of Boston, a renowned saint, named Bobolph, over whose bones a stately church was built. The town which gathered round the tomb of St. Bobolph was called Bobolph's Town, and this name was shortened and rounded into Boston.

**AN ANXIOUS GUARDIAN.**—Lads generally get their training in the merchant service by being sent as apprentices in the first place. The premium varies with the standing of the ship and its owners. Your best plan will be to select a good firm and communicate with them. You will get all particulars from them. Everything depends on the start the boy makes. We cannot do so. Correspondents are never replied to through the post. It is against the rules of the paper.

**SUFFERER.**—Stammerers, when whispering, rarely show any impediment in speech. On this fact a new method of treatment has been advocated, which is as follows: In the first ten days speaking is prohibited; this will allow rest to the voice, and constitutes the preliminary plan of treatment. During the next ten days speaking is permissible in the whispering voice; and in the course of the next fifteen days the ordinary conversational tone may be gradually employed.

**OBSCLETE.**—The first Monday after the Epiphany, Plough Monday, as we believe, still observed as a festival in many parts of Great Britain. In former times the ploughmen kept lights burning before favourite shrines in order to obtain a blessing on their labours. They also went from house to house begging money to "speed the plough" by paying for the tapers. Latterly the money so collected has been diverted from the original purpose of its collection and spent in dissipation.

**TIN TACK.**—The jaguar, so often referred to in stories of the border, is a flesh-eating animal of the cat family, which includes also the lion, tiger, leopard, panther, puma, and lynx. The word jaguar comes from jaguara, the Brazilian name of the animal. It is a good climber and swimmer. It is but little smaller than the tiger, and can drag off an ox or a horse with ease. Its fur is usually brownish yellow, very prettily marked with circles of black, with dark spots in the back. By some it is called the South American tiger. Their skins are very handsome, and are sought for by robbers.

**BELMONT.**—It is the last year of the nineteenth century, as you will see by studying the following: A person born the day after Christ was born was born in the first day of our Lord, or in A.D. 1. A person born 366 days after Christ was born in the second year of our Lord, or in A.D. 2. A person born in A.D. 99 was born in the ninety-ninth year of our Lord. A person born in A.D. 100 was born in the one hundredth year of our Lord. Consequently the first century ended with the end of 100 A.D. Therefore, the nineteenth century ends with 1900, and 1900 is the last year of this century.

**CURIOSUS.**—If stamp placed upside down on the top left-hand corner, that means—"The writer loves you." Crosswise, same corner—"My heart belongs to another and can never be yours." Proper way, same corner—"Good-bye for the present, dearest." At right angle, same corner—"I hate you." Bottom left-hand corner, same way—"I wish your friendship, but no more." Upside down, same corner—"Write soon." If put on a line with the surname on left-hand side—"Accept my love." Upside down, same position—"I am already engaged." Upside down, right-hand corner—"My heart is another's. Write no more." Crosswise, same corner—"Do you love me, dearest?" Right-hand side of surname, proper way—"I long to see you. Write immediately." Bottom right-hand corner, upside down—"Yes." Bottom right corner, proper way—"Business correspondence." No stamp at all means great indignation on the part of the receiver, with twopence to pay in addition.

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